

The NATIVITY
Luke C II. V. 16.



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THE

LIFE

OF OUR

LORD and SAVIOUR

JESUS CHRIST.

Containing an accurate and universal HISTORY of our

GLORIOUS REDEEMER,

From his BIRTH to his ASCENSION into HEAVEN.

TOGETHER WITH THE

LIVES AND SUFFERINGS

OF HIS

Holy Evangelists, Apostles, and Disciples,

Who have sealed the DIVINE TRUTH of CHRISTIANITY with their Blood.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

A full Defence of CHRISTIANITY,

Against all the Objections of ATHEISTS, DEISTS, and INFIDELS.

THE WHOLE

Properly adapted to promote the Knowledge of RELIGION.

By the Reverend J. FLEETWOODE, B.D.

With considerable IMPROVEMENTS.

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PREFACE.

THE firſt and greateſt object that ſhould moſt materially engage the attention of mankind is, the purſuit of that knowledge, which tends to promote their welfare while on this tranſitory ſtage of life, and their eternal happineſs in that which is to come. No meaſures whatever can be taken to effect this, but the moſt earneſt endeavours to make themſelves perfectly acquainted with, and ſtrictly to follow the example of, our Bleſſed Redeemer, the great Captain of our Sufferings—the preſerver of our ſouls from death to life everlaſting—the grand pattern of ſanctity, humility, meekneſs, and charity—the King of Glory—the guiding ſtar to righteouſneſs—and who, as he himſelf expreſſes it, is *the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*

As, therefore, in our Bleſſed Redeemer only reſts the whole of our eternal ſalvation, let Him only engroſs our moſt ſerious attention; and let the examples of his Holy Apoſtles, who have ſealed their faith with their Blood, inſpire us with reſolution, and make us emulous to be accounted voluntary ſervants of Chriſt, who condeſcended to ſuffer an ignominious death, to clear us from our ſins, that we might eſcape the puniſhment due to our manifold offences.

In ſeriouſly peruſing the Life and Tranſactions of the Great Redeemer of Mankind, we ſhall there find thoſe balmy ſweets, thoſe ſolid comforts, which, if properly attended to, will promote our felicity here, and ſecure to us eternal happineſs hereafter. If we endeavour to purſue the divine ſyſtem laid down by our Bleſſed Saviour, there is no reaſon to doubt but our obedience will be crowned with that reward, which he hath

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hath been pleaſed to promiſe to all thoſe who imitate his glorious example. Our Lord himſelf tells us, that if we are poor in ſpirit, we ſhall gain the kingdom of heaven—if we mourn here, we ſhall be comforted—if we hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs, we ſhall be filled. It is from theſe aſſurances, that St. Auguſtine ſays, "the happineſs of this life conſiſts in the holy Goſpel, without which we cannot come to the knowledge of God." All true knowledge, virtue, and perfection, that a Chriſtian can deſire, or attain to, are contained in the doctrines and tranſactions of our Glorious Redeemer; who teaches us, that Righteouſneſs and Holineſs conſiſt in the inward purity of the mind, not in the outward ſhew of works—in a conſcience void of offence; not in the pompous applauſe of men—in humility; not in oſtentation—in contempt; not in purſuit of worldly honours: and he farther teaches us to love our enemies as well as our friends. Here we read of the nature of true faith; of truſting in Chriſt alone; and how we ought not to glory but in Him. Here we read alſo of the certainty of ſalvation, the forgiveneſs of ſins, the reſurrection of the body, and of life eternal.

We moſt ſincerely hope, that the peruſal of this Work, will produce that effect for which it is ſo happily adapted, namely, the promotion of the Cauſe of Chriſtianity, and making mankind wiſe unto ſalvation. A ſerious attention to the divine tranſanctions contained in this Hiſtory will fill the mind with awful, though pleaſing ideas; baniſh every doubt; confirm the Reader in the moſt ſublime truths, and fill his ſoul with divine extacies.

We ſhall only farther obſerve, that, in the execution of this performance, we have endeavoured to improve the underſtanding and warm the heart; to inſpire the mind with gratitude for the aſtoniſhing love of a dying Saviour, and excite the ſoul to embrace his kind invitations of forgiveneſs, of happineſs, and of peace.

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THE LIFE OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, AND HIS APOSTLES AND EVANGELISTS.

CHAPTER I.

Preſage of the Birth of Chriſt. Prediction of the Birth of John the Baptiſt. Salutation of the Bleſſed Virgin by the Angel. Viſitation of the Virgin Mary to Elizabeth. Birth of the Baptiſt.

NO event that ever did, or perhaps ever will happen, can more remarkably diſplay the wiſdom and power of the GREAT JEHOVAH, than the glorious manner in which he brought life and immortality to light, by the Goſpel of his only Son, manifeſted in the fleſh.

Hiſtory, as it refers merely to human events, is a pleaſing and inſtructing ſubject; but that which relates to our immortal intereſt certainly claims our moſt ſerious regard.

The mind of man cannot be more delightfully employed, than in the contemplation of the wiſdom and goodneſs of the Omnipotent Creator of the Univerſe, who, by the leaſt ſuſpected means, and weakeſt inſtruments, confirmed and eſtabliſhed that glorious Goſpel, on which depend all the Chriſtian's hope of eternal ſalvation.

Notwithſtanding the ſtrength and number of its enemies, the church of Chriſt grew, from the moſt inconſiderable

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ſiderable beginnings, to an immenſe fabrick or building in the Lord; nor ſhall the united efforts of earth and hell be able to prevail againſt it. As it was planted, ſo it was reared by an Almighty Hand, which, like the careful huſbandman, pruned and cultivated each tender ſprig, till it arrived at full perfection, or, to uſe the words of our Lord, "The leaſt of all ſeeds grew up and waxed a great tree, and ſpread out its branches, and filled the earth."

Thus prevailed eternal Truth; nor could the inveterate Jews, or ſuperſtitious Heathens, reſiſt its progreſs, though Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and people of Iſrael, "gathered themſelves together againſt the Lord, and againſt his anointed;" for the doctrine of God confounded the wiſdom of the former, and overcame the folly of the latter.

If we ſurvey the works of a ſtupendous Creator, we ſhall find that a few arrived at perfection at once. This obſervation is amply confirmed by the various productions in the natural, and changes in the moral world. The Supreme Being, who conducts all his operations according to his infinite wiſdom, appears to have retained the ſame maxim in the regulating of his kindeſt deſign to the ſons of men. The Divine mind and will, were not revealed to mankind, at firſt, in their cleareſt evidence and fulleſt ſplendor. The dawn, in a ſpiritual, as well as in a natural ſenſe, preceded the meridian glory: the former revelation was but a type or earneſt of the latter, and, in compariſon with it, intricate and myſterious.

The All-gracious God, as it ſeemed beſt to his unerring wiſdom, was pleaſed, by degrees, to open and unfold his glorious councils; and man, by degrees, attained to the knowledge of the great plan of ſalvation, and the means uſed by its great Author to promote and eſtabliſh it.

Some time before the incarnation of the bleſſed Jeſus, an opinion prevailed among the pious part of the Jews, that the GREAT JEHOVAH would condeſcend to favour them with a clearer revelation of his mind and will, by the miſſion of ſome eminent perſon qualified from above, to inſtruct them in the ſame. This opinion was founded on the predictions of the ancient prophets, who had deſcribed, with the utmoſt beauty and clearneſs, the perſon, character, and glory of the Meſſiah, appointed

appointed by God, in his own time, to declare his eternal councils to mankind.

Relying on the fulfilment of these prophecies, the devout persons among the Jews imagined the time appointed by God at hand, and that the promised Messiah would shortly make his appearance, and therefore are said to have "waited night and day for the consolation of Israel." These people, at that time grievously oppressed by the Roman power, and consequently anxious of regaining their liberty, as well as revenging themselves on their tyrannical oppressors, waited the accomplishment of the prophecies, with the most solicitous desire. But this opinion of the approach of a general deliverer extended much farther than the country of the Jews; for, through their connections with so many countries, their disputes with the learned men amongst the Heathens, and the translation of the Old Testament into a language now almost general, their religion greatly prevailed in the east, and consequently their opinion that a Prince would appear in the kingdom of Judea, who would dispel the mists of ignorance, deliver the Jews from the Roman yoke, and spread his dominion from one end of the world to the other.

While the eastern world were fraught with these sanguine hopes, the very angel who had appeared to Daniel the prophet, with a certain information, as to the period of the Messiah's coming, as well as his transactions in this lower world, was sent to Zacharias, a pious priest, while he was executing his office before God, in the order of his course (which was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord) to foretel, that a child should spring from him and his wife Elizabeth, though they were stricken in years, who should be endowed with extraordinary gifts from heaven, and honoured with being the forerunner of the Saviour of the world.

Zacharias, when he saw the angel, though he knew him to be of heavenly extraction, could not judge the subject of his mission, and therefore discovered a mixture of fear and surprise; but the aerial ambassador cheared his desponding soul with this kind address; "Fear not, Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard, and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John." That he waited, day and night, for the consolation of Israel, he well knew, which is all we can understand by his prayer being heard; for it was unnatural

unnatural for him to think that he and his wife Elizabeth, who were advanced in years, ſhould have a ſon; nay, he intimates his doubts concerning it in theſe words: "Whereby ſhall I know this, for I am an old man, and my wife well ſtricken in years." Beſides, he was a prieſt of the courſe of Abiah, whoſe particular office was to pray in behalf of the people, for public and national bleſſings; ſo that it is very reaſonable to think, that on all occaſions of public worſhip, he prayed moſt earneſtly for the accompliſhment of the prophecies relative to the appearance of the long-expected Meſſiah, who was promiſed as a general bleſſing to all the nations of the earth.

That this was the great ſubject of his prayer appears from the declaration of Gabriel: the prayer thou haſt directed with ſincerity to an Almighty ear, concerning the coming of the Meſſiah, "is heard; and behold thy wife Elizabeth ſhall bear thee a ſon," who ſhall prepare the way for the mighty Redeemer of Iſrael. The old prieſt, indeed, was as much aſtoniſhed at the ſubject of the miſſion, as he was at the appearance of the meſſenger; and eſteeming it impoſſible that his wife, thus advanced in years, ſhould conceive a ſon, weakly demanded a ſign to confirm his belief, in the fulfilment of the promiſe, though he knew the authority of the angel was derived from the God of Truth. But as it is the lot of humanity to err, Zacharias had, for that time, forgot that nothing was impoſſible to Omnipotence, as well as that it was not the firſt time that the aged were cauſed to conceive, and bear a child. The leaſt reflection would have reminded him, that Sarah conceived, and bare Iſaac, when ſhe was far advanced in years; and that Samuel was born of a woman, who had been long reputed, and even called *barren*.

His curioſity was, indeed, gratified, but in a manner that carried with it, at once, a confirmation of the promiſe, and a puniſhment of his unbelief. As he had verbally teſtified his doubt of the fulfilment of the prediction of the angel, he was puniſhed with the loſs of his ſpeech, which was to continue to the very day, in which the prediction ſhould be accompliſhed; "Behold, thou ſhalt be dumb, and not able to ſpeak, until the day that thoſe things ſhall be performed, becauſe thou believeſt not my words, which ſhall be fulfilled in their ſeaſon."

Zacharias ſoon received an awful teſtimony

teſtimony of the divinity of the miſſion of Gabriel, who was no ſooner departed, than he was ſtruck dumb; for when he came to pray in the courſe of his office, during the oblation of his incenſe, he could not utter a word, and was under the neceſſity of making ſigns to the people, that an angel had appeared unto him in the temple, and that he was deprived of the faculty of ſpeech, as a puniſhment for his doubting the fulfilment of an event of which he had been foretold concerning him.

Soon after Zacharias departed to his own houſe (the days of his miniſtration being accompliſhed) his wife Elizabeth, according to the prediction of the angel, conceived; and retired into a private place, where ſhe lived five months in the uninterrupted exerciſes of piety, devotion, and contemplation on the myſterious providences of the Almighty, and his amazing goodneſs to the ſinful children of men.

When Elizabeth was advanced ſix months in her pregnancy, the ſame heavenly ambaſſador was ſent to a poor virgin, called Mary, who lived in obſcurity in Nazareth, under the care of Joſeph, to whom ſhe was eſpouſed. This man and woman were both lineally deſcended from the houſe of David, from whoſe loins it was foretold the great Meſſiah ſhould ſpring.

This virgin being ordained by the Moſt High to be the Mother of the great Saviour of the world, was ſaluted by the angel in moſt reſpectable terms. "Hail! thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: bleſſed art thou among women!" Such an addreſs, from ſo exalted a Being, greatly alarmed the meek and humble virgin, to allay whoſe fear, and encourage whoſe heart, the angel related, in moſt rapturous terms, the ſubject of his embaſſy, which was to aſſure her, That ſhe was choſen by God to the greateſt honour which could be conferred on a mortal, and which would perpetuate her memory; an honour no leſs than that of being mother of the promiſed and long-expected Meſſiah, who upon earth ſhould be called *Jeſus*, becauſe he ſhould ſave his people from their ſins, be the reſtorer of human nature, and the procuring cauſe of eternal bliſs to ſinners, who had forfeited the favour, and incurred the reſentment, of an offended God: but that this divine perſon in heaven was conſidered as the Son of the Moſt High God; to whom ſhould be given by

his Almighty Father, the throne of David his earthly Father, on which he ſhould preſide, and which, being the whole church of Chriſt, the houſe of Jacob, the ſpiritual Iſrael, or the kingdom of the Meſſiah, ſhould continue for ever and ever.

The aſtoniſhed virgin, unmindful, likewiſe, that Iſaiah had long ſince propheſied, "That a virgin ſhould conceive, and bear a ſon;" thought her virginity an inſurmountable barrier to the fulfilment of the prophecy, eſpecially as ſuch an event had never before happened ſince the creation of the world, and therefore required of the angel an explanation of the manner in which ſuch a circumſtance could be effected.

This deſire by no means implies ſhe did not remember, that with God all things were poſſible, but only ſerves to prove the weakneſs of her apprehenſion on the one hand, or her diffidence and ſenſe of her own unworthineſs on the other.

The angel, therefore, perceiving the goodneſs of her diſpoſition, notwithſtanding ſome little proof of human weakneſs, and ſhortneſs of ſight, vouchſafed an immediate anſwer to her enquiry, "The Holy Ghoſt ſhall come upon thee, and the power of the Higheſt ſhall cover thee;" or in other words, this miraculous event ſhall be brought about by the aid of the Holy Spirit, and wonderful exertion of the Moſt High. As thy conception is effected by the immediate interpoſition of the Holy Spirit: "Therefore that holy thing which ſhall be born of thee, ſhall be called the Son of God." To confirm her faith in the glorious meſſage, the heavenly meſſenger obſerved to her, that her couſin Elizabeth, notwithſtanding her advanced years, and reputed barrenneſs, was above ſix months pregnant, aſſigning this inconteſtible argument for the miraculous incident: "For with God nothing ſhall be impoſſible."

This reply not only removed all her doubts and fears, but filled her with inexpreſſible joy, ſo that ſhe even anticipated the promiſed felicity; for ſhe, with the reſt of the daughters of Jacob, had long indulged a hope of being ſelected by God to be the honoured Mother of the Saviour of Iſrael; and therefore, on her being aſſured that ſuch happineſs was deſtined her by the great diſpoſer of all events, ſhe thus expreſſed her reliance on the fulfilment of the divine promiſe, and perfect acquieſcence in the pleaſure of the Almighty: "Behold the handmaid

maid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word."

The angel had no sooner departed, than Mary set out for the mountainous country of Judea, though at a very remote distance from Nazareth, in order to rejoice with her cousin Elizabeth, in the joyful news she had received from the angel concerning her. The rapture and delight which filled the minds of Mary, Joseph, and Elizabeth, on the occasion of this salutation, can alone be expressed by the affecting description recorded by the Evangelist Luke, who is peculiar for the beauty of his style, and elegance of his expression.

That Evangelist writes, that the salutation of Mary had such an effect upon Elizabeth, that on her hearing of the miraculous event which had befallen the virgin, the babe leaped within her, and that she being inspired with a holy delight, on the approaching prospect of the nativity of our Saviour, exclaimed with rhapsody, "And whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" Nor did her extacy cease with this token of humility and joy on the important event, in the ardour of which she evinced that prophetic influence, which, while it amazed the blessed virgin, could not fail of establishing her belief in what the angel had foretold; for she repeated the very words expressed by the angel, in his salutation of the holy virgin, "Blessed art thou among women," together with a quotation from the psalms, and "blessed is the fruit of thy womb."

For as Mary conceived the seed long promised, and earnestly desired the seed in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, he could not but be blessed himself, according to the words of the psalmist; "His name shall continue as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed." The happy virgin, catching the holy flame from the aged Elizabeth, broke out into an humble acknowledgment of her unworthiness, and the wonderful grace of the Almighty, in appointing her to the exalted honour of bearing the Redeemer of Israel, as expressed in those known words, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, &c."

Having thus confirmed herself, by this visit, in the belief of the prediction of the angel Gabriel when the period of Elizabeth's pregnancy approached, she returned to Nazareth,

reth, having reſided in Judea about three months.

Soon after the departure of Mary, Elizabeth brought forth her ſon, the appointed harbinger of the King of Glory; and on the eighth day after his birth, according to the Judaical cuſtom, he was circumciſed, and called, according to the appointment of the angel, John, alluding, in the Hebrew tongue, to the gracious diſplay of the wiſdom and goodneſs God was about to manifeſt to the world, by the ſpreading of the goſpel of his ſon, of whom this John was the appointed forerunner.

The promiſe being thus fulfilled, the aged prieſt was reſtored to his ſpeech, and immediately broke out into praiſe and rapture at the marvellous works of God, in ſtrains which aſtoniſhed all around him.

This ſurpriſing event greatly alarmed the people of the adjacent country, who were divided in their opinions concerning a child, whoſe birth was attended with ſo many extraordinary circumſtances. Indeed, theſe incidents were worthy of general admiration; that he who was to be the forerunner of the mighty Saviour of Iſrael, ſhould not make his entrance on life in an obſcure and common manner, but with particular tokens of the favour of heaven, in order to attract the obſervation of his countrymen, and excite their attention to that miniſtry which he was called to by God, even the preparation of the people for the reception of the Meſſiah, who was ſhortly to appear.

It is obſervable, that the Baptiſt, from his infancy, diſplayed great qualities, both of mind and body; for ſuch was his ſtrength of conſtitution, through the bleſſing of the God of Nature, that he lived till near the thirtieth year of his age, when his public miniſtry began, in the mountains and deſart country of Judea, bereft of almoſt all the comforts of life. But at length the prophecy of the good old Zacharias, relating to his future elevation, was literally fulfilled; "Thou, O child, ſhall be called the prophet of the higheſt; for thou ſhalt go before the face of the Lord, to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of ſalvation to his people, by the remiſſion of their ſins, through the tender mercies of our God, whereby the day ſpring from on high hath viſited us: to give light to them that ſit in darkneſs, and in the ſhadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace."

As Joſeph had abſtained from all matrimonial

matrimonial intercourſe with his wife, he was not a little alarmed, when ſhortly after her return to Nazareth, ſhe diſcovered evident ſigns of pregnancy; nay, ſo far was he wrought on by circumſtance, that he abſolutely reſolved on a diſſolution of the marriage; but previous to ſuch a rigorous procedure, queſtioning her concerning the ſame, ſhe, to wipe off ſo foul an aſperſion, minutely related to him the particulars of the viſion from the angel, and the extraordinary event that had befallen Zacharias and Elizabeth.

Notwithſtanding this ingenuous declaration, Joſeph's ſuſpicions continued, and ſuggeſted to him that this might be a device, concerted by the friends of Mary, to exempt her from that diſgrace, which muſt attend a divorce on ſuch pretence; however, he reſolved to execute his purpoſe as private as poſſible, without aſſigning a cauſe for the ſame, which, under their conſtitution, would have ſubjected her to the penalty of death.

But, on cooler reflection, he called to mind the ſovereign power of Omnipotence; for which reaſon, however oppoſite her caſe might be to the nature of things in general, her vindication might be well grounded. He now thought himſelf bound, by every tie of juſtice and duty, to preſerve her character inviolable; though as he was a juſt man, and a moſt religious obſerver of the law, the aſſertions ſhe made did not appear to him ſufficient to juſtify him in retaining her in his houſe.

While he was thus ruminating on this particular event, he was overtaken with a pleaſing ſlumber, and received a communication from above, which fully revealed the cauſe and manner of Mary's pregnancy, diſpelled his doubts, and encouraged him to take home his falſley ſuſpected ſpouſe; "Joſeph, thou ſon of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghoſt."

The aged Joſeph complied with the voice of heaven moſt chearfully; for no ſooner did the morning dawn appear, than he aroſe from his couch, and obeyed the commands of the Moſt High, by relating to his wife his being aſſured of her innocence, and immediately reſtored her to former favour.

While he related to her the manner of this extraordinary revelation, by a meſſenger from the heavenly Canaan, he diſcovered in her a remarkable chaſtity of heart, entirely

conformable to ſo myſterious an operation, and knew her not, till ſhe had brought forth the Great Redeemer of Iſrael.

Thus was fulfilled that which was foretold by the prophets, and particularly the prediction of Iſaiah, which imported, That a virgin ſhould bring forth a ſon.—" Behold, a virgin ſhall conceive, and bear a ſon, and ſhall call his name Immanuel," which, being interpreted, is, God with us. *Iſa.* vii. 14.

CHAPTER II.

General Degree for Taxation publiſhed. Birth of Chriſt. Declaration of the ſame to the Shepherds. Circumciſion, and Preſentation of Chriſt in the Temple. The Wiſe Men of the Eaſt worſhip the Holy Child. Flight of Joſeph into Egypt. Maſſacre of Infants at Bethlehem. Death of Herod. Return of Joſeph out of Egypt.

AUGUSTUS CÆSAR, the Roman emperor, having, at this time, iſſued an edict for a general taxation on all the nations, cities and towns, ſubject to the empire, king Herod, in conſequence of that decree, commanded all under his government to muſter in the city of his people, or place of his deſcent, that an eſtimate might be taken of their perſons and effects. Purſuant to this order, Joſeph and Mary, as deſcendants from the line of David, departed from Nazareth, where they then reſided, and came to Bethlehem, a city of Judea, the place of the nativity of David, and his anceſtors.

So numerous were the people that repaired to this place, on account of the general degree, that every dwelling was occupied; and Joſeph and Mary, though they could not depart thence till after the taxation, were forced to take up their reſidence in an humble ſtable, the ſpot in which it pleaſed the Divine Wiſdom ſhould be born the Lord of Life and Glory, who, as a perfect example of humility to all his followers, was to make his entrance into, and his exit out of, the lower world, in the ſame mean and humble manner.

In this lowly tenement the bleſſed Virgin brought forth her firſt-born God-like Son, wrapped him in ſwaddling clothes, and laid him (having no better place) in a manger.

It is remarkable, that all the generations of the intervening ſpaces, between three of the moſt remarkable periods, relative to the houſe of David, and the birth of our bleſſed Saviour, are exactly the ſame; for the evangeliſt Matthew informs us, that all the generations, from Abraham

ham to David, are fourteen generations; and from David unto the Babyloniſh captivity, are fourteen generations; and from the Babyloniſh captivity unto the birth of Chriſt, are alſo fourteen generations. The ſame evangeliſt alſo traces his genealogy from Abraham, and proves his lineal deſcent from that father of the faithful, through the line of David, from race to race, to that of the humble Virgin, and the aged Joſeph. —But to return to the immediate ſubject of our hiſtory.

The humble manner in which the bleſſed Jeſus made his appearance in the world, did not long eclipſe the glory of his deſcent; a heavenly meſſenger being diſpatched from above to apprize mankind of their Saviour's incarnation. It pleaſed the wiſe diſpoſer of all things, by this holy angel, firſt to make known to ſome honeſt ſhepherds, who were watching their flocks by night, in the neighbouring fields, the birth of the long-promiſed, long-expected Meſſiah. The radiance which ſhone around them terrified the aſtoniſhed peaſants; but to diſſipate their fears, and confirm their joys, the divine meſſenger interpoſed, and thus addreſſed them; "Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which ſhall be to all people. For unto you is born, this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Chriſt the Lord. And this ſhall be a ſign unto you; Ye ſhall find the babe wrapped in ſwaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

The glorious news was no ſooner proclaimed, than a number of the celeſtial choir were heard to reſound the praiſes of the Almighty for this tranſcendent diſplay of his goodneſs to ſinful men: "Glory to God in the higheſt, and on earth peace, good will towards men." Tranſported with the happy tidings of the birth of the Redeemer of Iſrael, the angel no ſooner departed, than the ſhepherds haſtened to Bethlehem, in queſt of the babe, whom, according to the information of the ſacred miſſionary, they found wrapped in ſwaddling clothes, and lying in a manger. This event, ſo exactly conformable to the angel's prediction, equally delighted and amazed them; nor could they conceal the purport of his miſſion, but publiſhed abroad all they had ſeen or heard.

Having viewed with praiſe and wonder their long expected Saviour, and offered their grateful praiſes to God, for the manifeſtation of his goodneſs to mankind, they departed with

with hearts filled with love and gratitude, ſtill glorifying the Almighty Parent of univerſal nature.

After the expiration of eight days, from the birth of the holy Infant, he was circumciſed, according to the Moſaic inſtitution, and his name was called JESUS; that appellation being given him by the angel, who appeared to the virgin, before her conception. It was requiſite he ſhould conform to this cuſtom; a ceremony which characterized the Jewiſh nation, and was one of the principal injunctions of the Moſaic law, under which he was made; in order to fulfil all that is ſpoken of him in the Scriptures.

Beſides, as all the promiſes made Abraham were to be fulfilled in the Meſſiah, it was neceſſary he ſhould receive the ſeal of circumciſion, in order to prove his deſcent from the patriarch, concerning whom it was foretold, "In thy ſeed ſhall all the families of the earth be bleſſed." As a further reaſon for our Lord's compliance with this Jewiſh inſtitution, we may urge the propriety of his finiſhing the former diſpenſation, by an exact adherence to its rules, as he was about to eſtabliſh another, and better covenant; which could not be effected more fully, than by conforming to that ſacrament, which was of divine injunction, and indiſpenſably requiſite to admiſſion into the former.

As the ſame inſtitution alſo required that every firſt-born ſon, without any regard to circumſtance or family, ſhould be preſented to the Lord, in the temple, by delivering him into the hands of the prieſt, and paying five ſhekels, together with an offering, which, from the poorer ſort, conſiſted of a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons; a ceremony in commemoration of the divine mercy in ſparing the firſt-born in Iſrael, when thoſe of Egypt, both men and beaſt, were deſtroyed: his parents having tarried at Bethlehem till the days of Mary's purification were accompliſhed, brought the child *Jeſus* to Jeruſalem, and there preſented him in the temple to the Lord, in the manner juſt deſcribed, with the offering allowed to the lower order of people; a repeated inſtance of the exact obedience of the immaculate Jeſus, to the ceremonial law, as well as the poverty of his parents, though deſcended from a royal houſe.

During the preſentation of the holy Infant, there entered the temple a pious and venerable old man, named Simeon, who, with all the devout,

child and his parents; in reality, he acted as if the event gave him no concern, and in a manner wholly different from the general expectation of the people.

However, the Magi, having obtained the intelligence they ſought in Jeruſalem, ſet forward, under the guidance of the ſame ſtar that conducted them from their own country, but had left them on their arrival in Judea, which was the cauſe of their directing their courſe to the capital, in order to ſeek that information, which, by the deſertion of the ſtar, became requiſite. Thus we find that the deſign of the Almighty, in directing the eaſtern Magi to the capital of Judea, was, that the whole nation might be made acquainted with the cauſe of their journey.

Accordingly, they had no ſooner proceeded from Jeruſalem on their way to Bethlehem, than their kind conductor again appeared, went before them to the very city, and fixed on the habitation of the heavenly Infant. Guided by this celeſtial conductor, they entered the houſe, and proſtrating themſelves at the ſacred feet of their ſpiritual king, preſented him with gifts of gold, frankincence and myrrh. Having thus accompliſhed the deſign of the expedition, they propoſed, according to promiſe, returning to Jeruſalem, but being diverted from that intention by a dream, in which they were warned by God of Herod's deſign, they purſued another courſe, towards their own country, and by thoſe means defeated his malicious purpoſe.

But it is natural and reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that the end of the divine wiſdom, in directing theſe eaſtern Magi to the kingdom of Judea, to worſhip the child JESUS, was not merely to gratify the curioſity of the wiſe men, becauſe the event promoted many other very important deſigns, ſome of which we ſhall mention.

It proved to ſucceeding ages, the great expectation the Gentiles formed of the appearance of the Meſſiah, and conſequently eſtabliſhed the truth of thoſe prophecies, which related to that event, as well as excited in the minds of men the moſt ſanguine hopes and longing deſires.

As theſe Magi, doubtleſs, reported, on their return to their countrymen, the particulars they had heard and ſeen in the kingdom of Judea, relative to the Meſſiah, ſuch report muſt certainly have promoted the belief of the goſpel in thoſe parts, when afterwards preached there by the apoſtles. The expedition of the wiſe men was the cauſe of the anſwer of the Sanhedrim, in which it was unanimouſly declared to be the opinion of all the Jewiſh Rabbies, then living, that, according to ancient prophecies, Bethlehem was the place appointed by the Almighty to give birth to the promiſed Meſſiah.

It alſo contributed to another valuable purpoſe, in that the offerings of the wiſe men procured a ſubſiſtence for the holy family in Egypt, whither they were ſoon after warned to fly, in order to eſcape the vengeance of the enraged king; for no ſooner had the wiſe men departed from Bethlehem, than Joſeph was warned by a heavenly meſſenger, of the barbarous purpoſe of Herod, and commanded to fly into Egypt, with the young child and his mother.

Joſeph, in obedience to the Almighty command, roſe that very night, and fled into Egypt, "and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was ſpoken of the Lord, by the prophet; ought of Egypt have I called my ſon," This prophecy, which is quoted from Hoſea, ſeems originally to refer to the Iſraelites; through the Evangeliſt's reference will be amply juſtified, by conſidering that the Egyptian captivity alludes to their ſubjection of the Iſraelites to great hardſhips, and their deliverence from the ſame, by an Almighty hand.

Now, as the departure of the holy family into Egypt was in obedience to the divine command, in order to protect the Infant from the incenſed Herod, the application of the prophet, "Out of Egypt have I called my ſon," appears very juſt, as well as elegant. The king of Judea long waited, with the moſt earneſt expectation, the return of the wiſe men, anxious to glut his full reſentment on the innocent JESUS; till, from their long delay, he began to ſuſpect a deluſion, and that his deſigns were fruſtrated by ſome extraordinary interpoſition of Providence.

At length, irritated by diſappointment, he reſolved to accompliſh by cruelty, a reſolution he could not effect by art, and accordingly iſſued orders to a large party of ſoldiers to go throughout Bethlehem, and the neighbouring villages, and maſſacre all the children they could find therein, that were two years old, and under; thinking that the Infant JESUS, whom, as a prince, he both envied and dreaded, would fall in the general ſlaughter.

But the heavenly miſſionary was ſheltered from above: nor was the relentleſs king permitted to impede the deſigns of an Almighty Creator.

However, the cities through which the ſoldiers carried their deſtructive ſword, exhibited ſuch ſcenes of horror and diſtreſs, as could not fail to thrill every ſoul not entirely loſt to humanity. No ſound was heard but the piercing cries of parents, the groans of expiring babes, and a general imprecation of vengeance on the mercileſs tyrant. But he did not long ſurvive the cruel decree, being ſwept away by a naucious diſeaſe, to anſwer for his conduct at the bar of a tremendous Judge.

No deſcription can paint the horror of ſuch a ſcene of relentleſs cruelty in a more glaring light, than the verſe quoted by the evangeliſt Matthew, from the prophet Jeremiah, "Then was fulfilled that which was ſpoken by Jeremiah the prophet, ſaying, in Rama there was a voice heard, lamentations and weeping, and great mourning. Rachael weeping for her children, and would not be comforted becauſe they were not." This prophecy muſt not be underſtood literally, but deſcriptively, or as a figure, uſed to diſplay the horror of the ſcene, as there applied by the evangeliſt, in which acceptation it has a peculiar beauty; repreſenting Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob, buried many years ago in the fields of Bethlehem, awakened by the cries of ſlaughtered children, burſting even the chains of death, and lamenting the hapleſs fate of the murdered innocents which ſurrounded her.

The tyrant Herod being thus cut from off the face of the earth, Joſeph was

was warned by a heavenly meſſenger to return to the land of Iſrael. The good old man obeyed the Almighty command, and appears to have had a great deſire of reſiding in Judea, and very probably in Bethlehem: but hearing that Herod was ſucceeded in his throne, by his ſon Archelaus, and fearing that he might purſue the barbarous deſign of his father, he directed his courſe another way: but being warned again by a heavenly miſſion, he retired into Galilee, then under the government of a mild and benevolent prince, called Antepas, and took his habitation at Nazareth, where the particular circumſtances which attended the birth of the bleſſed JESUS were not generally known. The evangeliſt affirms that Joſeph, with the Infant and his mother, reſided in Nazareth, where the holy JESUS ſpent his youth, "That it might be fulfilled which was ſpoken by the prophet, He ſhall be called a Nazarene."

The advocates for infidelity, whoſe notice the ſmalleſt inaccuracy in the ſacred ſcriptures has not eſcaped, have not failed to obſerve, that the evangeliſt refers to what he cannot juſtify from any of the prophetical writings, in which there are no ſuch words to be found, as "He ſhall be called a Nazarene." But be it known, that the evangeliſt may, with juſtice, be vindicated from impropriety, by reminding theſe ſceptics, that though the very words are not to be found, the alluſion is juſt, and conſequently the application. This expreſſion refers to the general contempt and ridicule in which the Iſraelites held the Galileans, and eſpecially the Nazarenes, who were even deſpiſed by the Galileans themſelves, inſomuch that the word Nazarene became a term of reproach.

Now as the prophet in general foretold the diſgrace and infamy through which the bleſſed JESUS ſhould paſs, they conſequently foretold he ſhould be called a Nazarene, or expoſed to every token of contempt and ridicule, of which this appellation, at that time, was a remarkable inſtance.

It is evident that our Lord's reſidence at Nazareth tended, in a remarkable manner, to the fulfilment of thoſe prophecies, becauſe in the courſe of his public miniſtry, he was frequently reproached with the ſame, and his countrymen often urged it as a reaſon for their diſregard of his doctrine. But as the ſtubbornneſs of unbelief will never admit of conviction, we have therefore added theſe remarks, to confirm the faith of the Chriſtian, rather than convince the obſtinate infidel.

CHAP. III.

State of our Lord's childhood, and private Life. His Argument with the Jewiſh Doctors. Miſſion, Character, and Doctrine of the Baptiſt. Baptiſm of Chriſt, and viſible Deſcent of the Spirit on that Solemnity.

THE preciſe circumſtances of our Lord's childhood and life, previous to his public miniſtry, cannot be aſcertained from the writings of any of the evangeliſts, which can only be relied on as authentic. All we can gather from thoſe

thoſe inſpired men is, that the faculities of his mind were enlarged in proportion to the growth of his body, inſomuch that he arrived at the very perfection of heavenly wiſdom.

As his parents were low and poor, he had not the advantage of a finiſhed education; and he ſeems to have received no other inſtruction, than what his parents gave him, in conformity to the Jewiſh laws. But ſupernatural abilities amply compenſated for the deficiency of natural acquirements, and he gave inſtances in his earlieſt years, of amazing penetration and conſummate wiſdom.

According to the Moſaic inſtitution, his parents annually went up to Jeruſalem; and when he arrived at the age of twelve years, carried him with them to that city, in order that he might early imbibe the precepts of religion and virtue. In this place the holy JESUS tarried, without the knowledge, and conſequently the conſent of his parents, who departed with the reſt that were going towards Galilee, and thinking that he was gone forward, with ſome of their relations or acquaintance, they continued their journey, not doubting but they ſhould overtake him on the road, or meet him at the place where they had appointed to lodge. But on their arrival, not finding the child in the village, nor amongſt their relations, they returned to Jeruſalem much troubled, and after a moſt anxious ſearch of three days, found him in the temple, ſitting among the learned doctors, who were amazed at the wiſdom of his queſtions, and the pertinence of his replies, which were greatly ſuperior to the utmoſt they could expect from one of his tender years, and mean education.

Theſe doctors, or expounders of the law among the Jews, always taught the people publicly on the three great feſtivals; and it was on one of thoſe public occaſions that the bleſſed JESUS gave ſuch manifeſt proofs of his wiſdom and penetration as aſtoniſhed all beholders, many of whom thought he muſt be ſomething more than human. As, according to his own declaration, he was employed in his Father's buſineſs, it is natural to think, in the courſe of his diſputes, he modeſtly corrected ſome of the errors which the Jewiſh doctors then taught, and which were repugnant to the plan of that religion he came to promote and eſtabliſh. The wonder of his parents, at finding him in ſuch ſublime employment, was beyond expreſſion; though his pious mother, notwithſtanding the pleaſure which the diſcovery afforded her, could not help ſhewing the concern which his abſence, without their knowledge, had occaſioned them by addreſſing him thus, "Son, why haſt thou dealt thus with us? Behold thy father and I have ſought thee ſorrowing." To this queſtion he replied, "That their ſurpriſe at his abſenting himſelf without their knowledge was groundleſs and abſurd, as they might have been aſſured from his extraordinary birth, and the wonderful circumſtances attending it, that his Father was no leſs than the Almighty One of Iſrael; that he aſſumed human nature to promote his glorious deſigns; and, therefore, as his errand was of ſuch moment, they muſt not imagine he could always reſide with them. How is it that ye ſought me? Wiſt ye not that I muſt be about my Father's buſineſs?

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Though his parents did not clearly diſcern the force of this excellent remonſtrance, his pious mother committed his words to memory, and, together with Joſeph her huſband, joyfully returned with him to their poor dwelling at Nazareth, where he lived with them in dutiful ſubjection, and thereby afforded a noble example for the imitation of all children who certainly are bound to yield obedience to their parents, ſince the ſon of God himſelf, when on earth, has ſet them the pattern, practiſing every branch of filial duty to his earthly parents.

Our Saviour continued in this lowly ſtate for ſome time, during which he greatly advanced both in knowledge and ſtature; and by his extraordinary qualities, attracted the regard and admiration of all who either ſaw or heard him.

Being happily free from thoſe inordinate diſquietude deſires, which diſturb and diſtract mortals in general, he was always in temper calm and ſedate, which added to a pleaſant countenance, combined to prove the ſtrength of his faculties, and the goodneſs of his diſpoſition. He was alſo an excellent orator, being endowed with a moſt nervous and perſuaſive elocution, inſomuch that his hearers, frequently aſtoniſhed at the ſubſtance and manner of his addreſs, would ſuddenly cry out, "Never man ſpake like this man." Notwithſtanding our Lord was ſent upon earth, to execute his heavenly Father's will, yet during the time in which he lived thus humbly with his parents, he condeſcended to work with his father at his trade of a carpenter, and therefore left us a ſhining example of induſtry.

Thus obſcurely did the bleſſed JESUS live till the time of his public miniſtry: nor did he ſhew any miracles, or perform any actions, to diſtinguiſh him from the reſt of mankind.

As this is the whole account we could collect from ſacred hiſtory, concerning the childhood and private life of the bleſſed JESUS the Saviour of mankind, we muſt content ourſelves therewith, not ſeeking to indulge a curioſity which ſuch ſilence ſeems to forbid as ſinful and impertinent.

Many people of more ſpeculation than piety, may be induced to inquire the cauſe which prevented the evangeliſts giving us an exact detail of the tranſactions of our Saviour's life, from the twelfth year of his age till the time of his public miniſtry. To ſuch we anſwer that the deſign of the inſpired writers being to inſtruct, rather than to amuſe, they conſulted our intereſt, more than our humour and caprice; and that, therefore, the wiſdom of God, by whoſe inſpiration they wrote, demands our admiration, in that they paſſed over leſs important parts of our Saviour's life, which would have ſwelled their goſpels to an enormous bulk, fit only for the peruſal of the ſtudious, and thoſe perſons who had much vacant time; whereas the four goſpels, as they are written, make only a ſmall volume, which is convenient for carriage, for reading, for the memory to retain, as well as adapted, by the plainneſs of their ſtile to the meaneſt capacities; notwithſtanding which, they contain all the important tranſactions of our Saviour's life, ſuch as thoſe which relate to his mediatorial office, the deſign of his coming, which

was to teach us thoſe things which belong to our eternal peace and happineſs; to inſtruct us in his heavenly doctrines, as our prophet; to offer himſelf a ſacrifice upon the croſs, as our prieſt; and to burſt the chains of death, and triumphantly aſcend into heaven, as king, or head of his church.

The omiſſions, therefore, can be of no real conſequence, ſince, "Theſe are written that ye might believe that JESUS is the Chriſt, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through his name."

During the obſcure ſtate of our bleſſed Redeemer of Nazareth, the emperor Auguſtus died, in Campania, after a long reign of near forty years, to the general regret of the whole Roman empire. He was ſucceeded by Tiberius his ſtep-ſon, a prince of a very different temper of mind from his predeceſſor. This emperor, in the ſecond year of his reign, recalled Rufus from the government of Judea, and ſent Valerius Gracchus to ſucceed him. After reigning eleven years, Gracchus was recalled, and ſucceeded by Pontius Pilate, a perſon reſembling, in diſpoſition, his maſter Tiberius, who was malicious, cruel, and covetous.

Soon after Pontius Pilate was appointed to the government of Judea, John the Baptiſt began to open his commiſſion for preparing our Saviour's way before him, according as was appointed, "The baptiſm of repentance for the remiſſion of ſins." Sacred hiſtory has not informed us of the manner in which the Baptiſt ſpent the former part of his life; but, according to ancient tradition, Elizabeth hearing of Herod's barbarous maſſacre of the infants of Bethlehem, fled into the wilderneſs to ſecure the infant John from the relentleſs cruelty of that inhuman monſter, and therefore nurtered him with all the tenderneſs of an affectionate mother. John the Baptiſt was about eighteen months old when his mother fled with him into the wilderneſs, within forty days after which ſhe died.

His aged father Zacharias, when he afterwards officiated in the temple, was ſlain by the command of Herod, for refuſing to diſcover the place of his ſon's abode. The intended harbinger of the bleſſed JESUS being thus deprived of his earthly parents, the Father of the fatherleſs took compaſſion on him, and ſent an angel to defend and ſupport him, till he had attained to a ſufficient age and ſtrength to provide for himſelf.

It appears, from the account of the evangeliſt, that he dwelt in the deſart till the time of his public miniſtry, reſembling the ancient prophet Elijah, in the meanneſs of his cloathing, and plainneſs of his diet. His dreſs was compoſed of camel's hair, his food the ſpontaneous productions of the wilderneſs, ſuch as locuſts and wild honey, and his drink the pure water of ſome chryſtal ſpring. His courſe of life was, indeed admirably adapted to the doctrine of repentance, which he preached, as well as to engage the attention of his hearers; ſo that it appears highly reaſonable, that thoſe people who waited the coming of the Meſſiah, with earneſt expectation, ſhould flock to him, anxious to hear what he had to deliver concerning him.

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He proved very ſucceſsful in his miniſtry, as he enforced the doctrine of repentance, becauſe the kingdom of heaven was at hand: perſons of all degrees and profeſſions flocked to him, confeſſed their ſins, were baptized in Jordan, and ſubmitted to whatever the Prophet preſcribed as neceſſary to obtain an inheritance in that kingdom, the approach of which he came to declare. Amongſt his converts were many of the Phariſaical tribe, ſome of whom confeſſed their ſins, and were likewiſe baptized in Jordan.

The converſion of the Phariſees ſurprized the Baptiſt, knowing that they maintained a high opinion of their own ſanctity, for which reaſon it was very aſtoniſhing that they ſhould expreſs any deſire of obtaining a remiſſion of their ſins. In ſhort, he was much ſurprized to find the whole nation ſo affected by his threatnings, eſpecially as he knew they expected ſalvation on account of their being of the ſeed of Abraham, a conceit which they greatly cheriſhed, and which they ſeem to have derived from a miſrepreſentation of the following paſſage: "Thus ſaith the Lord, who giveth the ſun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon, and the ſtars for a light by night; who divideth the ſea, when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of Hoſts is his name. If thoſe ordinances depart from before me, ſaith the Lord, then the ſeed of Iſrael alſo ſhall ceaſe from being a nation before me, for ever. Thus ſaith the Lord, if the heaven above can be meaſured, and the foundations of the earth ſearched out beneath, I will alſo caſt off the ſeed of Iſrael, for all that they have done, ſaith the Lord."

But the Baptiſt, to curb this arrogance, called them the "offſpring of vipers," inſtead of the children of Abraham: perhaps the Phariſees and Sadducees applied to John for baptiſm, thinking by that means to avoid the danger they might incur, from being the avowed enemies of the Meſſiah, whom they expected to come in all the pomp of royalty, and to maintain his ſuperiority by force of arms.

The Baptiſt, who was no ſtranger to theſe hypocritical ſects, well knowing their application to him aroſe from ſiniſter views, ſeverely reprimanded them in general; "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance."——O deceivers, hypocrites, whence have you obtained knowledge of the approaching event I am deſtined by God to make known? Whence have you ſenſe of the impending judgment of the Almighty? I have plainly told you the only method of avoiding it, by a ſincere repentance, which can only be evinced by the conformity of the heart and life to the word and will of God. "And begin not to ſay within yourſelves, we have Abraham to our father; for I ſay unto you, that God is able of theſe ſtones to raiſe up children unto Abraham." Deceive not yourſelves with a vain preſumption that eternal bleſſings are yours, merely on account of your lineal deſcent from Abraham: ſuch pretence will avail you nothing; for to partake of the promiſes made to that Father of the faithful alone, ſpiritually conſidered, you muſt ſhew forth ſome reſemblance of his faith and piety.

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The Almighty Creator, who formed our firſt parent out of the duſt, and cauſed Sarah to bear a ſon unto Abraham, when they were both well ſtricken in years, can, by virtue of his Omnipotence, raiſe up children unto that faithful patriarch, even from theſe very ſtones; children, indeed, who by the integrity of their hearts, and purity of their lives, ſhall prove their ſpiritual alliance to Abraham, and ſhare with him the promiſed ſalvation.

The Baptiſt, by this plain but honeſt declaration, at once ſet at nought the towering expectations of this hypocritical tribe, by ſhewing them that God reſpected the heart alone, and that all their pretences to deſcent, ceremonies, and other outward parade, was of no avail with him, who tried the heart, and ſearched the reins, of the children of men. He went farther, and aſſured them that conviction and confeſſion of ſin were not ſufficient; no, nor even a promiſe to forſake it, but that there muſt be a ſpeedy and actual putting it into practice. "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Delay not this important work, for the judgments of the Almighty are at hand; therefore if you continue in your ſins, impending ruin will certainly fall upon you.

Nothing can be more ſincere, nothing better calculated, than this doctrine of the forerunner of the bleſſed JESUS; it ſtruck at the very root of the Jewiſh prejudices, which induced too many of them vainly to rely upon outward rites and ceremonies, prayers, faſtings, &c. which if not performed with a proper ſpirit, and from proper views, were an abomination to a holy God. Nor did his conduct leſs reprove the pride and hypocriſy of the Scribes and Phariſees, than his doctrine; for whereas that upſtart clan uſed to ſhun the converſe of the publicans, and meaner ſort of people, and would rarely deign to give them inſtruction, the humble Baptiſt received their applications, in the moſt ſubmiſſive manner, and preached to them the abſolute neceſſity of faith, repentance, and obedience.

Indeed, throughout the whole of his miniſtration, he happily adapted his diſcourſes to the circumſtances and capacities of the various people he addreſſed; and took every pious means to prepare them for the reception of the promiſed Meſſiah, who was ſhortly to appear amongſt them in the glorious character of the Saviour and Redeemer of Iſrael.

Thus, by a life of inflexible virtue, diſcourſes nervous and pathetic, exhortations ſincere and fervent, and rebukes honeſt and courageous, the Baptiſt became renowned throughout the region of Judea. Such was the admiration of the people at his life and doctrine, that from the viſion of his father Zacharias in the temple, the arrival of the Magi at Jeruſalem, the prophecies of Simeon, the diſcourſes of Herod, circumſtances recent in their memories, they began to conjecture that John might be the promiſed Meſſiah, and were ever ready to pronounce him the Redeemer of Iſrael; ſo that had he aſpired to worldly dignity, he might, for a time, have ſhone in all the grandeur of human pomp, and claimed a regard ſuperior to any of the ſons of men. But

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pious in principle, and humble in heart, he could not arrogate honours of which he was conſcious of his unworthineſs; and therefore honeſtly undeceived his credulous followers, by aſſuring them, that ſo far from being the glorious perſon promiſed, he was only his forerunner; and that ſuch was his inferiority, that he was unworthy of doing his moſt menial offices. "But one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whoſe ſhoes I am not worthy to unlooſe." *Luke* iii. 16.

During the time of the Baptiſt's continuance at Bethabara, the bleſſed JESUS left his retirement at Nazareth, and previous to his public miniſtry, repaired to the banks of the river Jordan, where John was executing his commiſſion from above, in order to be there baptized by him. We cannot impute this conduct of our Lord, to any neceſſity there was for his conforming to the inſtitution of baptiſm; for purity needs no cleanſing. It is therefore evident, that his motive was to add a ſanction to that ordinance, for ever after appointed to be the initiating rite of chriſtianity. "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt."

It appears that John immediately, as it were by a prophetic revelation, knew the Saviour of the world; for we find from the evangeliſt, that he acknowledged his ſuperiority, and declined the office. "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comeſt thou to me?" Our Lord's anſwer, though ſhort, is very full and expreſſive, "Suffer it to be ſo now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteouſneſs." As if he had, Regard not the precedence at this time, but perform thy office; for it is neceſſary that we ſhould, in the minuteſt point, conform to the divine will, by which this inſtitution was enjoined.

The remonſtrance removed the objection of John, and he baptized the immaculate JESUS in the river Jordan, in the preſence of numerous ſpectators.

When the ceremony was performed, as he needed not the inſtructions uſually given on the occaſion, he went up ſtraitway out of the water, and kneeling on the bank of the river, fervently addreſſed his Almighty Father, for an abundant effuſion of his Holy Spirit, as he was now entering on his public miniſtry, the prelude of his important miſſion, the end of which was the ſalvation of mankind.

His prayer was heard, his requeſt was granted; and an immediate atteſtation of the divine pleaſure given by a viſible ray of glory around him, and an audible voice proceeding from the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, and pronouncing theſe words, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleaſed;" diſtinguiſhing his peculiar approbation of the bleſſed JESUS, by the epithet "beloved," as well as his ſtanding in that relation to him in a manner nearer than any of the human race, who are called, in common, the Sons of God. The voice reſembled not a human ſound; but was loud and awful, like the thunders of heaven, in order to ſtrike with reverence the ſurrounding multitude, and publicly declare the holy miſſion of the promiſed Meſſiah.

The bleſſed JESUS was called in the Old Teſtament, the Son of God, but was, on this occaſion, declared by the Almighty himſelf, to be the long-expected Diliverer of Iſrael. Thus, all who were preſent at this marvellous deſcent of the Holy Spirit were amply convinced of the divine miſſion of our bleſſed Lord, by an infallible teſtimony from above: this being *the ſtar that was to come out of Jacob, and the ſceptre that was to riſe out of Iſrael*, the *Shiloh*, foretold by the patriarch Jacob, the *Great Prophet*, by Moſes, *Holy One*, by David, the *Prince of Peace*, by Iſaiah, and the *Son of Man*.

But this remarkable event tended much more to the glory of the Meſſiah, than all thoſe prophecies, as it was, in ſome meaſure, a real diſplay of what they could only picture in the dark.

CHAP. IV.

Commencement of our Saviour's Miniſtry. His Temptation in the Wilderneſs. Deputation of the Sanhedrim to John the Baptiſt. Firſt Miracle wrought by the bleſſed Jeſus.

THE great Redeemer having thus complied with the inſtitution of baptiſm, and received a moſt convincing teſtimony of his heavenly Father's approbation, by the miraculous deſcent and effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt upon him, while praying on the banks of Jordan, in the preſence of a multitude of ſpectators, entered on his public miniſtry, at the age of thirty years, according to the cuſtom of the prieſts among the Jews.

It was apprehended by the people, that, as he had juſt begun his public office, he would repair to Jeruſalem, the ſeat of power and grandeur, in order to diſplay to the mighty and the learned, his miraculous abilities and effulgent glories.

But averſe to human parade, the heavenly-minded JESUS preferred ſolitude to the noiſe and hurry of mortal life: he therefore retired into the wilderneſs, in order to prepare himſelf, by faſting, meditation, prayer, and ſuſtaining temptation, for the important work on which he was entering, the ſalvation of mankind.

To promote this grand deſign, the evangeliſt writes, that this retirement into the wilderneſs was in conſequence of the immediate direction of the divine Spirit. Though ſolitude itſelf is melancholy, the bleſſed JESUS added to the diſmal ſcene, by retiring on a barren ſpot, ſurrounded by high and craggy mountains, and forming a dark and gloomy chaos.

In this wild and dreary ſituation the great Redeemer, as Moſes and Elijah had done before him, faſted forty days and forty nights, maintained an inceſſant communion with his heavenly Father, digeſted the doctrine he was about to deliver, and the obedience he came to perform: and by a total abſtinence from food for forty days and forty nights, evinced the divinity of his miſſion, or, in other words, proved, that he was a teacher come from God. But the melancholy ſolitude of a deſart, and the anxiety of hunger and thirſt, were but

but a ſmall part of our Saviour's ſufferings in the wilderneſs: Satan, that implacable foe to mankind, was permitted to buffet him with the moſt inſinuating wiles, and aſſail him with the moſt alluring temptations, in order to attempt the defeat of heaven's moſt gracious deſigns, and keep mankind under the dreadful dominion of ſin and death.

The enemies of revelation have not failed to repreſent this event in a moſt ludicrous manner: if any, therefore, ſhould demand why God permitted his only Son, the Saviour of the world, to be tempted by the devil, whoſe power was deemed to be reſtrained, we reply as follows: One cauſe of the Redeemer's being ſuffered to be tempted, was, that he, being perſonally acquainted with the wiles of Satan, might become a faithful and compaſſionate high-prieſt, know how to ſuccour his people in time of adverſity, and pity them when they fell into temptations.

That in order to be a ſhining pattern of every virtue, and alſo a wiſe and valiant General, the bleſſed Redeemer underwent all the difficulties and trials attending his ſervice, that we being animated by his glorious example, might not ſink under the preſſure and troubles which God, for our good, ſhould be pleaſed to lay upon us.

The Saviour of the world hath not only been expoſed to poverty and ridicule, but alſo to the moſt trying temptations of Satan; that as the Captain of our ſalvation has undergone the ſame, we ougnt not to faint when we are tempted, but, like him, be able to withſtand the fiery darts of the devil.

It doubtleſs appears highly proper, in order that our bleſſed Lord and Maſter might both enter upon, and proſecute his miniſtry, with more glory to himſelf, and advantage to mankind, that he ſhould previouſly overcome the moſt ſubtle arts of that deceiver, who, under the maſk of the ſerpent, ſeduced our firſt parents, and involved them and their poſterity in one common ruin.

The peculiar devices uſed by the ſerpent to trepan the Son of God, during the time of his faſting, are not recorded in holy writ, and conſequently cannot be aſcertained.

But at the expiration of the forty days, when the bleſſed JESUS had endured the keeneſt hunger, the tempter, to make proof of the divinity of his miſſion, inſolently demanded, why he bore the ſenſations of hunger, ſince, if he was the Son of God, he muſt have power to change even the ſtones of that dreary wilderneſs into bread; and by ſo marvellous a tranſmutation he might have the ſatisfaction of knowing the truth of what was ſaid concerning him at his baptiſm?

But our bleſſed Saviour repelled this device, by citing the words of Moſes, which implied, that God, whenever it ſeemed good in his ſight, could, by extraordinary means, provide for the ſupport of the human race. "Man ſhall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." *Luke* iv. 4.

Satan, being defeated in this effort, carried him to the top of a very high mountain, and thinking to gain upon his ambition, ſhewed him a bright view of all the kingdoms of the world, with their alluring glories, promiſing him univerſal empire over the whole, if he would bow down and yield to him the honour of the beneſaction. But

But obſerve his accurſed pride and arrogance in promiſing that which is the gift of God alone, univerſal empire over the earth; and requiring what was due to none but the Supreme, religious homage. This blaſphemy, as well as inſolence, incited the bleſſed JESUS to exert his divine authority, and command him in a peremptory manner, to deſiſt, citing this ſpecial injunction from ſacred writ, "Thou ſhalt worſhip the Lord thy God, and him only ſhalt thou ſerve." Thus repelled, he repeated the attempt, and having carried our Lord through the air, placed him on the pinnacle of a temple, and, by a taunt of inſolence, urged him to prove the truth of his miſſion, by caſting himſelf down from thence, citing, as an encouragement for him to comply with his deſire, a text from the pſalms. "If thou be the Son of God, caſt thyſelf down, for it is written, he ſhall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they ſhall bear thee up, leſt at any time thou daſh thy foot againſt a ſtone." *Matt.* iv. 6. But our Saviour ſoon baffled this attempt, by another apt quotation from ſcripture, "Thou ſhalt not tempt the Lord thy God." *Matt.* iv. 7. Thou ſhalt not provoke the Lord, either by diſobeying his command, or by an impertinent curioſity to know more concerning his mind and will, than he is pleaſed to reveal.

Thus baffled in all his art and devices, by the wiſdom and power of the Son of God, he departed from him for a ſeaſon, and a hoſt of celeſtial ſpirits, diſpatched from the regions of bliſs, came and miniſtered refreſhment to him, after his victory over the great enemy and deceiver of mankind.

Hence, notwithſtanding the ridicule of the infidel, chriſtians may derive great encouragement to fight manfully againſt the fleſh, the world, and the devil, under the banner of the great Captain of their ſalvation, who is ever ready to ſupply them with ſpritual armour, to ſuſtain the combat with that inveterate and ſubtle foe, whoſe devices he has experienced, being in every reſpect tempted like them.

During the time of our Saviour's retirement in the wilderneſs, his faithful harbinger the Baptiſt, being aſſured, from the miraculous deſcent of the holy Spirit, and other concurring teſtimonies, that JESUS was the promiſed and long-expected Meſſiah, continued publiſhing his miſſion to the multitude; ſo that the rulers in Jeruſalem received information of the ſurpriſing events that happened in Bethabara, beyond Jordan, before they ſaw the bleſſed JESUS, in confirmation of whoſe miſſion and doctrine they were effected.

Prompted by curioſity, they diſpatched a deputation of prieſts and levites to the Baptiſt, to demand of him, who this wonderous perſon was; whether he was the Meſſiah, or Elias; or that Prophet who was to riſe from the dead and precede the Meſſiah, the powerful Prince ſo earneſtly expected by the whole nation of Iſrael.

The Baptiſt frankly replied, that he was not the Meſſiah whom they expected, nor Elias, who, as they vainly thought, would perſonally appear amongſt them, nor any other prophet riſen from the dead: but at the ſame time hinted to them, that though he was not Elias himſelf, yet he was that perſon

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ſpoken of by the prophet Iſaiah, and of whom he thus propheſied, "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderneſs, prepare ye the way of the Lord; make ſtraight in the deſart a highway for our God." *Iſa.* xl. 3.

The Prieſts and Levites, not ſufficiently gratified with this reply of the Baptiſt, demanded of him, why he aſſumed the power of baptizing the people, if he was neither the Meſſiah, nor Elias, nor any of the ancient prophets riſen from the dead? To this demand John anſwered, I indeed baptize, to ſhew the neceſſity of repentance, but my baptiſm is only that of water, and wholly ineffectual in itſelf to the remiſſion of ſins: but that waſhing, foretold by Zacharias, is of moſt ſovereign effect; it is not my province, but ſolely that of the Meſſiah, who is actually upon earth, and among ye, though ye know him not, becauſe he hath not manifeſted himſelf unto the world. The Meſſiah is ſo far exalted beyond me in power and dignity, that I am not worthy to do him the meaneſt offices.

The day after the departure of the Prieſts and Levites from Bethabara, our bleſſed Lord left the wilderneſs, and repaired thither himſelf, while John was yet baptizing and preaching the doctrine of repentence.

The Baptiſt, as his grand buſineſs was to direct all perſons to the Meſſiah, for life and ſalvation, in and through him, embraced this ſeaſonable opportunity of pointing him out to the multitude, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the ſins of the world." Leſt the attending crowd ſhould ſurmiſe, that it had been previouſly concerted between Jesus and John, that the former ſhould aſſume, and the latter give him the appellation of Meſſiah, he publicly and ſolemnly declared, that he was equally with them ignorant of the pretenſions of Jesus to that high character, till he ſaw the miraculous deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt, and heard him pronounced, in the moſt awful manner, the Son of God. "And John bare record, ſaying, I ſaw the Spirit deſcending from heaven, like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that ſent me to baptize with water, the ſame ſaid unto me, Upon whom thou ſhalt ſee the Spirit deſcending and remaining on him, the ſame is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghoſt. And I ſaw, and bare record that this is the Son of God." *John* i. 32, 33, 34.

The Baptiſt having made this public declaration, the Meſſiah left Bethabara, but returned the day following; and John, happening to ſtand with two of his followers on the bank of the river Jordan, pointed to him as he paſſed, and in a pious rapture, repeated what John had addreſſed to the multitude the preceding day, "Behold the Lamb of God." It is hence imagined, that theſe two diſciples, or followers of the Baptiſt, were abſent at the time of the Holy Ghoſt, and for that reaſon this method was taken of pointing out to them the venerable perſon of the promiſed Redeemer of the world.

Animated with an arduous deſire of hearing, as well as ſeeing this extraordinary perſon, they left John, and followed Jesus, who, conſcious of their deſign, turned about, and with the ut-

moſt affability, gave them an invitation to the place of his reſidence. The evangeliſt John informs us, that one of theſe diſciples was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter; and it is conjectured, from his ſilence, that himſelf was the other; for it is remarkable, that in his writings he ſtudiouſly concealed his own name. Be that as it will, it is abundantly evident, that the teſtimony of the Baptiſt, added to the tokens he had from the bleſſed JESUS, in the courſe of his converſe with him, amply ſatisfied Andrew that he was indeed the promiſed Meſſiah, the Saviour and Redeemer of loſt and miſerable ſinners.

Andrew ſoon after found his brother Peter, and brought him to our bleſſed Lord, who immediately called him by his name, telling him, that he ſhould afterwards be called Cephas, (which ſignifies a rock) from his firm reſolution of mind, and alſo becauſe he ſhould contribute towards the foundation of the Chriſtian church.

Some time after JESUS caſually met with Philip, an inhabitant of the town of Bethſaida, and ſaid to him, "follow me." Philip immediately obeyed the divine command, having heard of the character and miſſion of our bleſſed Saviour. It is ſuppoſed that this diſciple was preſent at the miraculous deſcent of the Holy Spirit on our Lord at his baptiſm, which being admitted, his ready compliance with his call is no matter of admiration.

Philip meeting with Nathaniel, an inhabitant of Cana, a town in Galilee, informed him of the actual coming of the long-expected Meſſiah, that great Deliverer of Iſrael, ſpoken of by Moſes, and the ancient prophets; "JESUS of Nazareth the Son of Joſeph." Nathaniel was aſſured, from the predictions concerning the Meſſiah, that he was to be deſcended from the line of David, and born in the city of Bethlehem, and therefore diſcovered an amazement at his being called JESUS of Nazareth; "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Can that moſt contemptible of places, Nazareth, be ſuppoſed to have given birth to the mighty Saviour, the Prince of peace, eſpecially as it was expreſsly foretold by the prophet, that he was to be born in Bethlehem, the city of David?"

Notwithſtanding the improbability of ſuch an event, Nathaniel liſtened to Philip, and determined on an examination of the perſon whom he ſaid was the promiſed Meſſiah. Accordingly, under his direction, he repaired to the bleſſed JESUS, who, knowing his character, ſaluted him on his approach, with this honourable appellation: "An Iſraelite, indeed, in whom there is no guile."

Nathaniel, amazed at our Lord's pertinent addreſs, as he had never before ſeen him, aſked by what means he obtained ſuch preciſe knowledge of him? Our Lord replied, he had ſeen him under the fig-tree. Probably Nathaniel had been praying under the fig-tree, and been overheard by our Lord, who, from the ſubſtance of his prayer, thus concluded his character; for when the bleſſed JESUS informed him that he gave him that character on account of what had paſſed under the fig-tree, Nathaniel perceived that he knew not only what paſſed at a diſtance, but had acceſs to the

the inmoſt thoughts of the heart, a property not allotted to mortals; and therefore exclaimed with rapture, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the king of Iſrael!"

Our Saviour then told him, he ſhould hereafter have much ſtronger teſtimonials of the divinity of his miſſion, when he ſhould be eye-witneſs to what the old patriarch Jacob had before ſeen in a viſion, the angels of heaven "deſcending and aſcending," to attend the perſon, and execute the commands of the "Son of Man;" an appellation our dear Lord aſſumed not only as conſidering his humanity, but in order to fulfil moſt peremptorily that remarkable prediction of the prophet Daniel concerning him: "I ſaw in the night, viſions, and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages ſhould ſerve him. His dominion is an everlaſting dominion, which ſhall not paſs away, and his kingdom, that which ſhall not be deſtroyed." *Dan.* vii. 13. 14.

The great Redeemer having atteſted the divinity of his miſſion by many inconteſtable evidences, and made five diſciples, departed for Galilee, where, ſoon after his arrival, he was invited, with his mother and diſciples, to a marriage feaſt at Cana, a place near Nazareth.

At theſe nuptials there happened to be a ſcarcity of wine, and his mother, who intereſted herſelf in the conduct of the feaſt, and was therefore deſirous that every thing ſhould be done with decorum, applied to her Son, hoping he would be able to remedy the defect.

She had, doubtleſs, being eye-witneſs to his power of working miracles, and was therefore deſirous that he would give proof of his ability in the preſence of her friends who were aſſembled at the marriage.

Addreſſing herſelf, therefore, to her Son, ſhe ſaid to him, "they have no wine," Our Lord gently reproved her, in theſe words, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come;" that is, the time or period of my public miniſtry is not yet arrived; nor is it time for me to diſplay my ſupernatural powers.

Notwithſtanding this mild reproof, his mother ſtill entertained an opinion that he would intereſt himſelf in behalf of her and the company, and therefore ordered the ſervants punctually to obey his commands.

Our bleſſed Lord being aſſured that working a miracle would greatly tend to confirm the faith of his young diſciples, exerted his divine power, by ordering the ſervants to fill ſix water-pots, containing each about twenty gallons, with water; which was no ſooner done, than the whole was converted into excellent wine.

He then ordered them to draw, and bear to the governor of the feaſt, who being ignorant of the miracle that had been wrought, and aſtoniſhed at the preference of this wine to that which had been ſerved up at the beginning of the feaſt, addreſſed himſelf to the bridegroom, in the hearing of the whole company,

pany, telling him, that, contrary to the uſual cuſtom, he had reſerved the beſt wine to the laſt, at the ſame time commending ſo judicious a practice, as a plain proof of his approbation of his friends preſent at the entertainment. The bridegroom was equally ſurpriſed at the addreſs of the governor of the feaſt, and the occaſion of it, which was effected by the ſupernatural power of our bleſſed Lord.

This miracle, which was the firſt wrought by JESUS, confirmed the faith of his followers, and ſpread his renown throughout the adjacent country. The votaries of infidelity have not failed to arraign the truth of this event as well as to vent their ſarcaſtic humour upon it. Their mirth and ridicule ſeem chiefly founded on a ſuppoſition, that moſt of the company were intoxicated, and conſequently more liable to deluſion; but we deſire them to ſuſpend their opinion, or at leaſt their judgment a little, while we remind them, that the governor's ſpeech to the bridegroom, "Every man at the beginning doth ſet forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worſe," does not imply even ſuch a ſuppoſition; but an evident reference to the manner in which the entertainment was conducted, a manner much preferable to that cuſtomarily followed.

Nor can theſe wiſe people in their own conceit, rationally think, that JESUS ordered, or expected, that all the wine he had furniſhed ſhould be expended at this entertainment; though, according to the Jewiſh cuſtom on theſe occaſions, it continued a week. Permit us likewiſe to obſerve, that there might be a very important reaſon aſſigned for our Lord's furniſhing ſuch abundance; becauſe if the quantity had been conſiderably leſs, the miracle would have been much leſs apparent, and the enemies of Chriſtianity, ever ready to graſp at the ſhadow of the pretence, might have denied that a miracle was wrought at all, it having been eaſy to convey away a ſmall quantity of water, and ſubſtitute the like quantity of wine in its place; whereas ſuch a deception muſt be allowed impracticable, in ſo large a quantity, the tranſmutation being momentary.

The deiſts have likewiſe made much parade of argument concerning the ſize of theſe water-pots. In this we give them their utmoſt ſcope, perſuaded, that all which they can ſay on that head, will not in the leaſt tend to invalidate the Chriſtian cauſe.

The bleſſed JESUS having thus, by divers means, confirmed the faith of his diſciples, and atteſted the truth and divinity of his miſſion, among thoſe with whom he had been brought up, departed from Cana, and proceeded towards Jeruſalem, in order to keep the approaching paſſover.

CHAP. V.

Expulſion of the Profaners of the Temple. Jeſus viſits and diſputes with Nicodemus. Baptizes in Judea. Inſtructs a poor Samaritan. Heals a ſick Perſon at Capernaum. Retires again to Nazareth, and is expelled thence by his impious Countrymen.

OUR bleſſed Lord, immediately on his arrival at Jeruſalem, repaired to the temple, nor was he a little ſhocked


JOHN baptizing CHRIST.
Mark. 1 C. 9 V.
Martin Sc.
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titude, and publicly declare the holy miſſion of the promiſed Meſſiah.

The bleſſed Jeſus was called, in the Old Teſtament, the Son of God, but was, on this occaſion, declared, by the Almighty himſelf, to be the long expected deliverer of Iſrael. Thus, all who were preſent at this marvellous deſcent of the Holy Spirit were amply convinced of the divine miſſion of our bleſſed Lord, by an infallible teſtimony from above: this being *the ſtar that was to come out of Jacob, and the ſceptre that was to riſe out of Iſrael*, the *Shiloh*, foretold by the patriarch Jacob, the *Great Prophet*, by Moſes, the *Holy One*, by David, the *Prince of Peace*, by Iſaiah, and the *Son of Man*.

But this remarkable event tended much more to the glory of the Meſſiah, than all thoſe prophecies, as it was, in ſome meaſure, a real diſplay of what they could only picture in the dark.

CHAP. IV.

Commencement of our Saviour's Miniſtry. His Temptation in the Wilderneſs. Deputation of the Sanhedrim to John the Baptiſt. Firſt Miracle wrought by the bleſſed Jeſus.

THE great Redeemer having thus complied with the inſtitution of Baptiſm, and received a moſt convincing teſtimony of his heavenly Father's approbation, by the miraculous deſcent and effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt upon him, while praying on the banks of Jordan, in the preſence of a multitude of ſpectators, entered on his public miniſtry, at the age of thirty years, according to the cuſtom of the prieſts among the Jews.

It was apprehended by the people, that, as he had juſt begun his public office, he would repair to Jeruſalem, the ſeat of power and grandeur, in order to diſplay to the mighty and the learned, his miraculous abilities and effulgent glories.

But, averſe to human parade, the heavenly-minded Jeſus preferred ſolitude to the noiſe and hurry of mortal life: he therefore retired into the wilderneſs, in order to prepare himſelf, by faſting, meditation, prayer, and ſuſtaining temptation, for the important work on which he was entering, the ſalvation of mankind.

To promote this grand deſign, the evangeliſt writes, that this retirement into the wilderneſs was in conſequence of the immediate direction of the divine ſpirit. Though ſolitude itſelf is melancholy, the bleſſed Jeſus added to the diſmal ſcene, by retiring on a barren ſpot, ſur-

rounded by high and craggy mountains, and forming a dark and gloomy chaos.

In this wild and dreary ſituation the great Redeemer, as Moſes and Elijah had done before him, faſted forty days and forty nights, maintained an inceſſant communion with his heavenly Father, digeſted the doctrine he was about to deliver, and the obedience he came to perform; and by a total abſtinence from food for forty days and forty nights, evinced the divinity of his miſſion, or, in other words, proved, that he was a teacher come from God. But the melancholy ſolitude of a deſart, and the anxiety of hunger and thirſt, were but a ſmall part of our Saviour's ſufferings in the wilderneſs: Satan, that implacable foe to mankind, was permitted to buffet him with the moſt inſinuating wiles, and aſſail him with the moſt alluring temptations, in order to attempt the defeat of heaven's moſt gracious deſigns, and keep mankind under the dreadful dominion of ſin and death.

The enemies of revelation have not failed to repreſent this event in a moſt ludicrous manner: if any, therefore, ſhould demand why God permitted his only Son, the Saviour of the world, to be tempted by the devil, whoſe power was deemed to be reſtrained, we reply as follows. One cauſe of the Redeemer's being ſuffered to be tempted was, that he, being perſonally acquainted with the wiles of Satan, might become a faithful and compaſſionate high prieſt, know how to ſuccour his people in time of adverſity, and pity them when they fell into temptations.

That in order to be a ſhining pattern of every virtue, and alſo a wiſe and valiant general, the Bleſſed Redeemer underwent all the difficulties and trials attending his ſervice, that we, being animated by his glorious example, might not ſink under the preſſure and troubles which God, for our good, ſhould be pleaſed to lay upon us.

The Saviour of the world hath not only been expoſed to poverty and ridicule, but alſo to the moſt trying temptations of Satan; that as the captain of our ſalvation has undergone the ſame, we ought not to faint when we are tempted, but, like him, be able to withſtand the fiery darts of the devil.

It doubtleſs appears highly proper, in order that our bleſſed Lord and Maſter might both enter upon, and proſecute his miniſtry, with more glory

glory to himſelf, and advantage to mankind, that he ſhould previouſly overcome the moſt ſubtle arts of that deceiver, who, under the maſk of the ſerpent, ſeduced our firſt parents, and involved them and their poſterity in one common ruin.

The peculiar devices uſed by the Serpent to trepan the Son of God, during the time of his faſting, are not recorded in holy writ, and conſequently cannot be aſcertained.

But at the expiration of the forty days, when the bleſſed Jeſus had endured the keeneſt hunger, the tempter, to make proof of the divinity of his miſſion, inſolently demanded, why he bore the ſenſations of hunger, ſince, if he was the Son of God, he muſt have power to change even the ſtones of that dreary wilderneſs into bread; and by ſo marvellous a tranſmutation he might have the ſatisfaction of knowing the truth of what was ſaid concerning him at his baptiſm?

But our bleſſed Saviour repelled this device, by citing the words of Moſes, which implied, that God, whenever it ſeemed good in his ſight, could, by extraordinary means, provide for the ſupport of the human race. "Man ſhall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." *Luke* iv. 4.

Satan, being defeated in this effort, carried him to the top of a very high mountain, and thinking to gain upon his ambition, ſhewed him a bright view of all the kingdoms of the world, with their alluring glories, promiſing him univerſal empire over the whole, if he would bow down and yield to him the honour of the benefaction.

But obſerve his accurſed pride and arrogance in promiſing that which is the gift of God alone, univerſal empire over the earth; and requiring what was due to none but the Supreme, religious homage. This blaſphemy, as well as inſolence, incited the bleſſed Jeſus to exert his divine authority, and command him, in a peremptory manner, to deſiſt, citing this ſpecial injunction from ſacred writ, "Thou ſhalt worſhip the Lord thy God, and him only ſhalt thou ſerve." Thus repelled, he repeated the attempt, and having carried our Lord through the air, placed him on the pinnacle of a temple, and, by a taunt of inſolence, urged him to prove the truth of his miſſion, by caſting himſelf down from thence, citing, as an encouragement for him to comply with his deſire, a text from the pſalms. "If thou be the Son of God, caſt thyſelf

thyſelf down; for it is written, he ſhall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they ſhall bear thee up, leſt at any time thou daſh thy foot againſt a ſtone," *Matt.* iv. 6. But our Saviour ſoon baffled this attempt, by another apt quotation from ſcripture, "Thou ſhalt not tempt the Lord thy God," *Matt.* iv. 7. Thou ſhalt not provoke the Lord, either by diſobeying his command, or by an impertinent curioſity to know more concerning his mind and will, than he is pleaſed to reveal.

Thus baffled in all his art and devices, by the wiſdom and power of the Son of God, he departed from him, for a ſeaſon, and a hoſt of celeſtial ſpirits, diſpatched from the regions of bliſs, came and miniſtered refreſhment to him, after his victory over the great enemy and deceiver of mankind.

Hence, notwithſtanding the ridicule of the infidel, chriſtians may derive great encouragement to fight manfully againſt the fleſh, the world, and the devil, under the banner of the great captain of their ſalvation, who is ever ready to ſupply them with ſpiritual armour, to ſuſtain the combat with that inveterate and ſubtle foe, whoſe devices he has experienced, being in every reſpect tempted like them.

During the time of our Saviour's retirement in the wilderneſs, his faithful harbinger the Baptiſt, being aſſured, from the miraculous deſcent of the Holy Spirit, and other concurring teſtimonies, that Jeſus was the promiſed and long-expected Meſſiah, continued publiſhing his miſſion to the multitude; ſo that the rulers in Jeruſalem received information of the ſurpriſing events that had happened in Bethabara, beyond Jordan, before they ſaw the bleſſed Jeſus, in confirmation of whoſe miſſion and doctrine they were affected.

Prompted by curioſity, they diſpatched a deputation of prieſts and levites to the Baptiſt, to demand of him, who this wonderous perſon was; whether he was the Meſſiah, or Elias; or that prophet who was to riſe from the dead, and precede the Meſſiah, the powerful prince ſo earneſtly expected by the whole nation of Iſrael.

The Baptiſt frankly replied, that he was not the Meſſiah whom they expected, nor Elias, who, as they vainly thought, would perſonally appear amongſt them, nor any other prophet riſen from the dead: but at the ſame time hinted to them, that though

though he was not Elias himſelf, yet he was that perſon ſpoken of by the prophet Iſaiah, and of whom he thus propheſied, "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderneſs, prepare ye the way of the Lord; make ſtrait in the deſart a highway for our God," *Iſaiah* xl. 3.

The Prieſts and Levites, not ſufficiently gratified with this reply of the Baptiſt, demanded of him, why he aſſumed the power of baptizing the people, if he was neither the Meſſiah, nor Elias, nor any of the ancient prophets riſen from the dead? To this demand John anſwered, I indeed baptize, to ſhew the neceſſity of repentance, but my baptiſm is only that of water, and wholly ineffectual in itſelf to the remiſſion of ſins; but that waſhing, foretold by Zacharias, is of moſt ſovereign effect; it is not my province, but ſolely that of the Meſſiah, who is actually upon earth, and among ye, though ye know him not, becauſe he hath not manifeſted himſelf unto the world. The Meſſiah is ſo far exalted beyond me, in power and dignity, that I am not worthy to do him the meaneſt offices.

The day after the departure of the Prieſts and Levites from Bethabara, our bleſſed Lord left the wilderneſs, and repaired thither himſelf, while John was yet baptizing and preaching the doctrine of repentance.

The Baptiſt, as his grand buſineſs was to direct all perſons to the Meſſiah, for life and ſalvation, in and through him, embraced this ſeaſonable opportunity of pointing him out to the multitude, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the ſins of the world." Leſt the attending crowd ſhould ſurmiſe, that it had been previouſly concerted between Jeſus and John, that the former ſhould aſſume, and the latter give him the appellation of Meſſiah, he publicly and ſolemnly declared, that he was equally with them ignorant of the pretenſions of Jeſus to that high character, till he ſaw the miraculous deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt, and heard him pronounced, in the moſt awful manner, the Son of God. "And John bare record, ſaying, I ſaw the ſpirit deſcending from heaven, like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that ſent me to baptize with water, the ſame ſaid unto me, Upon whom thou ſhalt ſee the Spirit deſcending and remaining on him, the ſame is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghoſt. And I ſaw, and bare record that this is

the Son of God." *John* i. 32, 33, 34.

The Baptiſt having made this public declaration, the Meſſiah left Bethabara, but returned the day following; and John, happening to ſtand with two of his followers on the bank of the river Jordan, pointed to him as he paſſed, and, in a pious rapture, repeated what John had addreſſed to the multitude the preceding day, "Behold the Lamb of God." It is hence imagined, that theſe two diſciples, or followers of the Baptiſt, were abſent at the time of the Holy Ghoſt, and for that reaſon this method was taken of pointing out to them the venerable perſon of the promiſed Redeemer of the world.

Animated with an arduous deſire of hearing, as well as ſeeing this extraordinary perſon, they left John and followed Jeſus, who, conſcious of their deſign, turned about, and, with the utmoſt affability, gave them an invitation to the place of his reſidence. The evangeliſt John informs us, that one of theſe diſciples was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter; and it is conjectured, from his ſilence, that himſelf was the other; for it is remarkable, that in his writings he ſtudiouſly concealed his own name. Be that as it will, it is abundantly evident, that the teſtimony of the Baptiſt, added to the tokens he had from the bleſſed Jeſus, in the courſe of his converſe with him, amply ſatisfied Andrew that he was indeed the promiſed Meſſiah, the Saviour and Redeemer of loſt and miſerable ſinners.

Andrew ſoon after found his brother Peter, and brought him to our bleſſed Lord, who immediately called him by his name, telling him, that he ſhould afterwards be called Cephas, (which ſignifies a rock) from his firm reſolution of mind, and alſo becauſe he ſhould contribute towards the foundation of the Chriſtian church.

Some time after Jeſus caſually met with Philip, an inhabitant of the town of Bethſaida, and ſaid to him, "follow me." Philip immediately obeyed the divine command, having heard of the character and miſſion of our bleſſed Saviour. It is ſuppoſed that this diſciple was preſent at the miraculous deſcent of the Holy Spirit on our Lord at his baptiſm, which being admitted, his ready compliance with his call is no matter of admiration.

Philip meeting with Nathaniel, an inhabitant of Cana, a town in Galilee, informed him of the actual coming

ing of the long-expected Meſſiah, that great deliverer of Iſrael, ſpoken of by Moſes, and the ancient prophets; "Jeſus of Nazareth the Son of Joſeph." Nathaniel was aſſured, from the predictions concerning the Meſſiah, that he was to be deſcended from the line of David, and born in the city of Bethlehem, and therefore diſcovered an amazement at his being called Jeſus of Nazareth; "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Can that moſt contemptible of places, Nazareth, be ſuppoſed to have given birth to the mighty Saviour, the prince of peace, eſpecially as it was expreſſly foretold by the prophet, that he was to be born in Bethlehem, the city of David?

Notwithſtanding the improbability of ſuch an event, Nathaniel liſtened to Philip, and determined on an examination of the perſon whom he ſaid was the promiſed Meſſiah. Accordingly, under his direction, he repaired to the bleſſed Jeſus, who, knowing his character, ſaluted him on his approach, with this honourable appellation: "An Iſraelite, indeed, in whom there is no guile."

Nathaniel, amazed at our Lord's pertinent addreſs, as he had never before ſeen him, aſked by what means he obtained ſuch preciſe knowledge of him? Our Lord replied, he had ſeen him under the fig-tree. Probably Nathaniel had been praying under the fig-tree, and been overheard by our Lord, who, from the ſubſtance of his prayer, thus concluded his character; for when the bleſſed Jeſus informed him that he gave him that character on account of what had paſſed under the fig-tree, Nathaniel perceived that he knew not only what paſſed at a diſtance, but had acceſs to the inmoſt thoughts of the heart, a property not allotted to mortals; and therefore exclaimed with rapture, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the king of Iſrael!"

Our Saviour then told him, he ſhould hereafter have much ſtronger teſtimonials of the divinity of his miſſion, when he ſhould be eye-witneſs to what the old patriarch Jacob had before ſeen in a viſion, the angels of heaven "deſcending and aſcending," to attend the perſon, and execute the commands of the "Son of Man;" an appellation our dear Lord aſſumed not only as conſidering his humanity, but in order to fulfil moſt peremptorily that remarkable prediction of the prophet Daniel concerning him: "I ſaw in the night, viſions, and behold, one like

like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages ſhould ſerve him. His dominion is an everlaſting dominion, which ſhall not paſs away, and his kingdom, that which ſhall not be deſtroyed." *Dan.* vii. 13, 14.

The great Redeemer having atteſted the divinity of his miſſion by many inconteſtible evidences, and made five diſciples, departed for Galilee, where, ſoon after his arrival, he was invited, with his mother and diſciples, to a marriage-feaſt at Cana, a place near Nazareth.

At theſe nuptials there happened to be a ſcarcity of wine, and his mother, who intereſted herſelf in the conduct of the feaſt, and was therefore deſirous that every thing ſhould be done with decorum, applied to her ſon, hoping he would be able to remedy the defect.

She had, doubtleſs, been eye-witneſs to his power of working miracles, and was therefore deſirous that he would give proof of his ability in the preſence of her friends who were aſſembled at the marriage.

Addreſſing herſelf, therefore, to her ſon, ſhe ſaid to him, "they have no wine." Our Lord gently reproved her, in theſe words, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come;" that is, the time or period of my public miniſtry is not yet arrived; nor is it time for me to diſplay my ſupernatural powers.

Notwithſtanding this mild reproof, his mother ſtill entertained an opinion that he would intereſt himſelf in behalf of her and the company, and therefore ordered the ſervants punctually to obey his commands.

Our bleſſed Lord being aſſured, that working a miracle would greatly tend to confirm the faith of his young diſciples, exerted his divine power, by ordering the ſervants to fill ſix water-pots, containing each about twenty gallons, with water; which was no ſooner done, than the whole was converted into excellent wine.

He then ordered them to draw, and bear to the governor of the feaſt, who being ignorant of the miracle that had been wrought, and aſtoniſhed at the preference of this wine to that which had been ſerved up at the beginning of the feaſt, addreſſed himſelf to the bridegroom, in the hearing of the whole company, telling him, that, contrary to the uſual cuſtom, he had reſerved the beſt wine

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to the laſt, at the ſame time commending ſo judicious a practice, as a plain proof of his approbation of his friends preſent at the entertainment. The bridegroom was equally ſurprized at the addreſs of the governor of the feaſt, and the occaſion of it, which was effected by the ſupernatural power of our bleſſed Lord.

This miracle, which was the firſt wrought by Jeſus, confirmed the faith of his followers, and ſpread his renown throughout the adjacent country. The votaries of infidelity have not failed to arraign the truth of this event as well as to vent their ſarcaſtic humour upon it. Their mirth and ridicule ſeem chiefly founded on a ſuppoſition, that moſt of the company were intoxicated, and conſequently more liable to deluſion; but we deſire them to ſuſpend their opinion, or at leaſt their judgment a little, while we remind them, that the governor's ſpeech to the bridegroom, "Every man at the beginning doth ſet forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worſe," does not imply even ſuch a ſuppoſition; but an evident reference to the manner in which the entertainment was conducted, a manner much preferable to that cuſtomarily followed.

Nor can theſe wiſe people, in their own conceit, rationally think, that Jeſus ordered, or expected, that all the wine he had furniſhed ſhould be expended at this entertainment; tho', according to the Jewiſh cuſtom on theſe occaſions, it continued a week. Permit us likewiſe to obſerve, that there might be a very important reaſon aſſigned for our Lord's furniſhing ſuch abundance; becauſe if the quantity had been conſiderably leſs, the miracle would have been much leſs apparent, and the enemies of Chriſtianity, ever ready to graſp at the ſhadow of the pretence, might have denied that a miracle was wrought at all, it having been eaſy to convey away a ſmall quantity of water, and ſubſtitute the like quantity of wine in its place; whereas ſuch a deception muſt be allowed impracticable, in ſo large a quantity, the tranſmutation being momentary. The deiſts have likewiſe made much parade of argument concerning the ſize of theſe water-pots. In this we give them their utmoſt ſcope, perſuaded, that all which they can ſay on that head, will not, in the leaſt, tend to invalidate the Chriſtian cauſe.

The bleſſed Jeſus having thus, by divers means, confirmed the faith of

his disciples, and attested the truth and divinity of his mission, among those with whom he had been brought up, departed from Cana, and proceeded towards Jerusalem, in order to keep the approaching passover.

CHAP. V.

Expulsion of the Prophaners of the Temple. Jesus visits and disputes with Nicodemus. Baptizes in Judea. Instructs a poor Samaritan. Heals a sick Person at Capernaum. Retires again to Nazareth, and is expelled thence by his impious Countrymen.

OUR blessed Lord, immediately on his arrival at Jerusalem, repaired to the temple, nor was he a little shocked at beholding a place, dedicated to the solemn service of Almighty God, so prostituted to purposes of fraud and avarice, and become the resort of traders of every kind.

Such abuse could not long escape his notice of correction, having an absolute right to chastise so flagrant a perversion of a place that, strictly speaking, was his own. "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple: even the messenger of the Covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts."

Accordingly, the blessed Jesus, whose pious soul was vexed at their prophanation of the sacred place, drove out the traders, and overset the tables of the money-changers, saying unto them that sold doves, "take these things hence; make not my father's house an house of merchandize."

These mercenary wretches appeared to have been struck at once with a consciousness of their guilt, and the severity of our Lord's reproof, as they immediately departed, without making the least resistance. But our Lord's conduct in this affair, carrying with it every token of zeal, for which the ancient prophets were so remarkable, the council assembled, and determined to enquire by what authority he attempted such a reformation, requiring, at the same time, a demonstrative proof of the divinity of his commission.

To gratify their curiosity, our blessed Lord referred them only to the miracle of his own resurrection; "Destroy," says he, laying his hand on his breast, "this temple, and I will raise it up in three days." The rulers, mistaking his meaning, imagined that he referred to the superb and lofty temple finished by Herod, and therefore told him such relation was highly improbable, nor had they the least reason to think he could possibly rebuild,

in

in three days, that magnificent ſtructure which had been finiſhed at immenſe expence, and was the labour of forty and ſix years.

Though the bleſſed Jeſus declined compliance with the requeſt of the mighty and noble amongſt the inhabitants of Jeruſalem, he wrought ſeveral miracles in the preſence of the common people, in order to confirm the doctrines he delivered, and prove the divinity of his miſſion.

As there had not been any miracles wrought amongſt them for a conſiderable time, though many were recorded in their ſacred books, they beheld our bleſſed Lord with amazement and veneration; and numbers were ſatisfied that he was the long-promiſed Meſſiah, the deſire of all nations, ſo often foretold by the ancient prophets. For wiſe reaſons, however, he did not publicly diſcover that he was the Great Prophet, as he knew that the faith of numbers was yet but weak, and that many would deſert his cauſe, when they found he was oppoſed by the Sanhedrim, or great council of the nation, and did not ſet up a worldly kingdom, as they thought the expected Meſſiah was to do. But the miracles wrought by the holy Jeſus did not excite the wonder and aſtoniſhment of the common and illiterate claſs of the people alone.

Nicodemus, a principal perſon among them, impartially reflecting on his wonderous works, ſo aſtoniſhing in their nature, ſo demonſtrative in their proof, ſo ſalutary in their effect, ſo happily adapted to the confirmation of his doctrines, and ſo perfectly agreeable to the attributes of the Deity, as well as the predictions of the ancient prophets, concerning the Meſſiah, "the Son of righteouſneſs, who was to riſe with healing in his wings;" was perfectly aſſured, that nothing leſs than Omnipotence itſelf could produce ſuch wonders; and thence, like many others of his countrymen, concluded, that Jeſus was of a truth the Son, and *ſent of God*, which laſt term is the meaning of the word *Meſſiah*. But ſcruples ſtill aroſe in his mind when, on the other hand, he conſidered the obſcurity of his birth, and the meanneſs of his appearance, ſo different from the exalted notions the people of the Jews always entertained concerning this powerful prince, who was to erect his throne in the mighty city of Jeruſalem, and ſubject to his dominion all the ſtates and kingdoms of the earth. To obviate, therefore, theſe ſcruples, and ſolve theſe perplexing

plexing doubts, Nicodemus resolved on an interview with the blessed Jesus; but chusing to conceal his visit from the other members of the Sanhedrim, who were greatly averse to his person and doctrine, he chose the night, as most convenient for that purpose.

His salutation of the mighty Redeemer of Israel was this: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. *John* iii. 2.

Rabbi, I am sufficiently convinced that thou art immediately sent as a teacher from on high; for nothing less than power divine could enable thee to perform the miracles which thou hast wrought in the presence of multitudes. But this salutation by no means implies, that Nicodemus thought Jesus the great promised Messiah, even the Redeemer of Israel; nor could he obtain that knowledge till it was revealed to him by the blessed Spirit of God.

We may observe, that our Saviour, waving all formality and circumlocution, which tend to no real profit, immediately preaches to this disguised Rabbi, the first great doctrine of Christianity, Regeneration; "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus, I declare unto thee, as a truth of the last importance; verily, verily, unless a man be regenerated in the spirit of his mind, have his will and affections transferred from earthly to spiritual objects, he cannot see the kingdom of God, which is holy and spiritual in its nature and enjoyments.

This was a mysterious system to the Rabbi, whose religious views extended no farther than rites and ceremonies, and were bounded by time and space; besides, he thought the very position of our Lord an absurdity in terms. "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Our Lord replies to this question, "Except a man be born of water, and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The regeneration which I preach unto you, is not of a natural, but of a spiritual nature: Unless a man embraces the Christian religion and doctrines, whose initiating ordinance is baptism, he cannot be the subject of divine glory; which consists not in earthly splendour, and the gratification of the meaner passions, but in an exemption

tion from whatever is earthly, ſenſual, and ſinful, and the proſecution of whatever is heavenly, holy, and ſpiritual. "That which is born of the fleſh is fleſh; and that which is born of the ſpirit is ſpirit. Marvel not that I ſaid unto thee, ye muſt be born again." Wonder not at my doctrine of Regeneration, which is deſigned to inform you, that you derive no excellence from your boaſted deſcent from Abraham; as ſuch you are merely earthly, ſubject to ſins, and infirmities of every kind: as well as to ſhew that you muſt undergo a ſpiritual mental regeneration, a renovation of the heart, which changes the whole man, and fits you for the participation of heavenly bleſſedneſs.

This important work is likewiſe ſpiritual in its operation, unſeen by mortal eyes, being wrought on the mind or heart of man, by the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit, which changes his nature, and, with reſpect to eternal things, makes him another, a new creature. "The wind bloweth where it liſteth, and thou heareſt the ſound thereof, but canſt not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: ſo is every one that is born of the ſpirit.

Notwithſtanding this explanation of the bleſſed Jeſus, Nicodemus was ſo prepoſſeſſed with partiality towards the Jews, who, on account of their alliance to Abraham, thought they were the people of God, entitled to Heaven, and conſequently, in no need of this new operation of the mind, called regeneration, that he again demanded, "How can theſe things be?" The divine inſtructor then reproves his dulneſs and miſapprehenſion of what he had ſo clearly explained, and propounded to him, eſpecially as he was himſelf a teacher of the people, and one of the great council of the nation. "Art thou a maſter of Iſrael, and knoweſt not theſe things?" The doctrines I deliver are not fiction and meer ſurmiſe, but founded on eternal truth, immediately revealed from God, and conſiſtent with the will of heaven. I am witneſs to the ſame, and therefore affirm that ſuch teſtimony is ſufficient to render them valid. But your prejudices ſtill prevail, nor can your unbelief be conquered by all the arguments I can advance. "We ſpeak that we do know, and teſtify that we have ſeen; and ye receive not our witneſs."

If ye thus reject the firſt principles of the Chriſtian religion, ſuch as the neceſſity of regeneration, or the influence of the ſpirit of God

upon the heart of man, how will ye believe the ſublimer truths I ſhall hereafter deliver concerning the kingdom of God, or ſtate of the ſaints in glory? If I inform you of ſpiritual tranſactions in this lower world, and ye believe not, how can ye believe if I tell you of thoſe things which relate ſolely to another, an heavenly ſtate? But to confirm your belief in what I have delivered, know that my aſſured knowledge of theſe things is derived from the Father of light, the God of truth, by whom I am veſted with gifts ſuperior to any of the ancient prophets.

No man hath aſcended the regions of immortality, but he who deſcended from thence, even "the Son of man," conſequently no man but the Son of man can, with truth and certainty, reveal the immediate will of the Father, who is in heaven. Your great Law-giver Moſes aſcended not there, Mount Sinai was the ſummit of his elevation; whereas the Son of man, who was in heaven, and came down from thence, with a divine commiſſion to ſinful mortals, had the moſt clear and convincing proofs of the will of his Almighty Father, penetrated into the deſigns of infinite wiſdom and grace, and conſequently muſt be higher than any prophet, being, in a peculiar ſenſe, the prophet of the moſt high God.

This divine preacher, who ſpake as no man ever ſpake, likewiſe labours to eradicate the favourite principal of the Jews, I mean, that of confirming all bleſſings, temporal and eternal, to their own nation and people, as well as to ſhew the vanity of their expecting the appearance of the Meſſiah, in pomp and magnificence.

To effect this glorious deſign he lays open to the Rabbi, that it was agreeable both to the doctrines of Moſes, as well as the will of God, that the Redeemer, in this ſtate of mortality, ſhould be expoſed to poverty and diſtreſs of every kind; that his conqueſts were not to be of a temporal nature, over the hearts and wills of mankind: that his throne was not to be eſtabliſhed in the earthly, but heavenly Jeruſalem, previous to which he was to ſhed his blood, as, by virtue of the ſame, all of every nation and kingdom, throughout the earth, might paſs into the heavenly world, and there, once for ever, provided they relied on his merits, and conformed their lives to the doctrines he preached, enjoy that ſummit of bliſs, which, through his ſufferings, was

was provided for them, by God himſelf, to all eternity.

This is the ſum and ſubſtance of Chriſtianity; this is the ſum and ſubſtance of what our bleſſed Lord preached to Nicodemus, that great ruler and teacher of the Jews; a ſermon comprehending the whole of what is neceſſary to be taught; notwithſtanding religion is at this day rent to pieces by ſectaries, each of whom invent ſome new-fangled doctrine, ſuggeſted by ignorance, or preſumption, or both united.

That God Almighty, the Father, out of his unſupplicated, unmerited grace and mercy to the ſinful race of men, ſent his only begotten Son to purchaſe eternal life, through the effuſion of his own blood, for all of every nation and kingdom throughout the earth, who ſhould believe in him; that is, who ſhould believe in the divinity of his miſſion, and the doctrines he taught, and, in conſequence of that faith, conform, as far as the infirmities of ſinful nature will permit, to the rules of his goſpel. "Only let your converſation be as becometh the goſpel of Chriſt." Condemnation juſtly paſſed on all tranſgreſſors of the law of God, (which are all mankind) can alone be averted according to the divine inſtitution, the propriety of which it is the height of impiety and preſumption to call in queſtion, by faith in the bleſſed Jeſus, ſuch a faith as we have juſt explained, "He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, becauſe he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

It appears from the future conduct of Nicodemus, that he was not merely, as at firſt ſuppoſed, a teacher come from God, but the Meſſiah, the Redeemer of Iſrael; for he afterwards conſtantly eſpouſed his cauſe in the great council of the nation; and when his countrymen put him to an ignominious death, together with Joſeph of Arimathea, conveyed him to burial, when all others had forſaken him.

The time of the paſſover at Jeruſalem being expired, Jeſus, together with his diſciples, withdrew into the remote parts of Judea, where he continued a conſiderable time preaching the kingdom of God, and baptizing the new converts. John the baptiſt being alſo, at the ſame time, baptizing in the river Enon, a diſpute aroſe between his diſciples, and certain Jews, concerning the preference of the baptiſm of Jeſus.

Being

Being unable to decide the point, they referred it to the opinion of John, on which the pious Baptiſt immediately declared, that he was only the harbinger of the great Meſſiah, who baptized not only with water, but with the Holy Spirit, adding, that his own miniſtry was on the decline, as the beauty of the morning ſtar, the harbinger of the ſun, decreaſes, when that fountain of light but dawns in the chambers of the eaſt.

The Baptiſt likewiſe mentioned to his diſciples and hearers many circumſtances tending to prove the divinity of the miſſion of the Holy Jeſus, and the important deſign of his incarnation. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlaſting life, but he that believeth not the Son ſhall not ſee life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

The Baptiſt, having publicly preached the great doctrine of ſalvation thro' faith in Jeſus, departed from the wilderneſs of Judea, where he had continued a conſiderable time, and went into Galilee, often repairing to the court of Herod, who eſteemed, or affected to eſteem, both his preaching and perſon. But John, being faithful in his miniſtry, could not fail to remonſtrate on the impiety and injuſtice of a known practiſe of Herod, which was, his cohabiting with Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; and thereby incurring the diſpleaſure of that ambitious woman, he was, at her inſtance, caſt into priſon, there to be reſerved for future deſtruction.

Whilſt theſe things happened in Galilee, our bleſſed Lord continued preaching in the wilderneſs, whither great numbers reſorted, attracted by curioſity, to ſee the miracles which fame reported he daily wrought. The ſucceſs of his miniſtry exciting the envy of the hypocritical tribe of Phariſees, our bleſſed Lord thought proper to retire into Galilee, in order to promote the deſign of his miſſion in thoſe parts.

In the courſe of his journey, being weary with travelling in ſo warm a country, and exceſſive thirſty, he ſat down in Samaria, by a celebrated well, given by the old patriarch Jacob to his ſon Joſeph, while his diſciples were gone to the city to procure proviſions.

While the humble Jeſus was ſitting by the well ſide, a woman, a native of the country, came with her pitcher to fetch water; and our Lord requeſted of her to give him to drink. The appearance of Jeſus aſtoniſhed the woman, becauſe ſhe knew him to be a Jew, and the Samaritans

maritans were held in the utmoſt contempt by thoſe people, who, indeed arrogated a preference to all nations upon the earth. But though ſhe knew him to be a Jew, ſhe knew not that he was the Son of God, full of grace and truth, diveſted of human prejudices, and the very eſſence of humility and every virtue. As the deſign of his coming into the world, was to promote the real happineſs of mankind, he embraced every opportunity of enforcing his ſalutary doctrines, and, therefore, though his thirſt was extreme, he delayed its gratification, in order to inform this woman, though of an infamous character, of the means by which ſhe might obtain living water, or, in other words, eternal life. As the beſt method to effect this purpoſe, he gave her to underſtand, that had ſhe known the character of the ſupplicant, ſhe would have eagerly ſatisfied his deſire, and have been retaliated by a gift, the moſt invaluable, even *living water*, iſſuing from the well of eternal ſalvation.

The woman, taking his words in the common acceptation, imagining that he ſuggeſted his power of ſupplying her with water flowing from a perpetual ſpring, which in that parched climate appeared impoſſible, demanded of him, if he was veſted with a power ſuperior to their father Jacob, who dug this well, drank out of it with his family, and left it for the benefit of poſterity.

The Saviour and friend of mankind, ſtill benign in his purpoſe towards this poor wretch, replied, "That all who drank of the water of Jacob's well would thirſt again, being but a temporary allay of a deſire incident to human nature; whereas thoſe who drank of the water which he was ready to diſpenſe, ſhould never thirſt; becauſe that water flowed from the inexhauſtible fountain of Divine Grace, and could not be drained but with immenſity itſelf."

Though this great preacher of Iſrael, by a ſimple and natural allegory, diſplayed the power of divine authority, the woman, blind to the alluſion, endeavoured to turn his pious and benevolent diſcourſe to ridicule, deſiring the gift of that living water, which would for ever prevent her from thirſting for the future.

To ſhew her the malignity of her preſumption, in turning into contempt the diſcourſe of him, who had the words of eternal life, the bleſſed Jeſus, by ſome pertinent queſtions and replies, evinced his knowledge

of her infamous courſe of life, and by that means convinced her that he acted under an influence more than human. To evade, however, the preſent ſubject of diſcourſe, which filled her with a degree of awe and fear, ſhe propoſed to his diſcuſſion a caſe long warmly conteſted between the Jews and Samaritans; whether mount Gerizmin, or the city of Jeruſalem, was deſtined by God, as the place peculiarly ſet apart for religious worſhip? Our bleſſed Lord replied to this evaſive, as well as inſignificant queſtion, that it was not the place, but the manner in which adoration was offered to the Father of Spirits, that rendered ſuch worſhip acceptable, obſerving that, "God is a ſpirit, and they that worſhip him muſt worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth." *John* iv. 24.

In conſequence of this reply to her, which apparently referred to things ſpiritual and eternal, ſhe informed the bleſſed Jeſus of her expectation of the arrival of the promiſed Meſſiah, who ſhould punctually inform them concerning theſe points ſo long and undeciſively conteſted.

Our Lord embracing the opportunity of preaching himſelf to this poor woman, as the Saviour of ſinners, replied, without heſitation, "I that ſpeak unto thee am he."

While Jeſus continued talking with the woman, his diſciples returned, and approached him at the very time when he told the woman that he was the Meſſiah. Though they were aſtoniſhed at his condeſcenſion in converſing with an inhabitant of Samaria, and even of inſtructing her in the doctrines of religion, none preſumed to aſk him why he converſed with one who was an enemy to the Jews, and the worſhip in the temple at Jeruſalem?—But the woman hearing Jeſus call himſelf the Meſſiah, left her pitcher, and ran into the city to publiſh the glad tidings, That the great deliverer of mankind was then ſitting by the well of Jacob; and had told her all the ſecret tranſactions of her life. This report aſtoniſhed the Samaritans, and, at the ſame time, rouſed their curioſity to ſee a perſon foretold by Moſes and the prophets, and of whoſe appearance there was then ſo univerſal an expectation.

The diſciples, on their return, ſet before their maſter the proviſion they had purchaſed; but he, wholly abſorbed in meditation, refuſed the refreſhment ſo highly requiſite, telling them

them he had "meat to eat that they knew nothing of."

This unexpected answer surprised his disciples, who, understanding his words in their natural sense, asked one another, Whether any person had, during their absence, supplied him with provisions? But Jesus soon explained the mystery, by telling them, that he did not mean natural, but spiritual food; that, to execute the commission he had received from his Father, was far better to him than meat or drink; and the satisfaction he was going to receive from the conversion of the Samaritans much greater than any sensual enjoyment.

Many of the Samaritans were now near Jesus, who, lifting up his eyes, and seeing the ways crowded with people coming to him from the city, stretched out his benevolent hand towards them, and addressed his disciples in the following manner: "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." *John* iv. 35. Behold yonder multitudes, how they are thronging to hear the word, which has only a few minutes been sown in their hearts! It is not, therefore, always necessary to wait with patience for the effect; for it sometimes immediately follows the cause. To gather this spiritual harvest, and finish the work of him that sent me, is my proper food: adding, for the encouragement of his disciples, as you have laboured with me in this harvest of souls, so shall you participate in the great recompense of eternal reward: "He that reapeth, receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal; that both he that soweth, and he that reapeth, may rejoice together. *John* iv. 36.

Many of the people had been so affected at the words of the woman, that they were fully persuaded Jesus could be no other than the great Messiah; accordingly, their first request was, that he would deign to take up his residence in their city. The compassionate Redeemer of the Human Race so far complied, as to stay with them two days, an interval which he spent in preaching to them the kingdom of God; so that the greatest part of the city embraced the doctrine of the gospel, and at his departure, the people said unto the woman, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this

this is indeed the Chriſt, the Saviour of the world." *John* iv. 42.

Having accompliſhed his gracious deſign in Samaria, Jeſus continued his journey to Galilee, to exerciſe his miniſtry, and preach there the kingdom of God; telling his diſciples, that the time was now accompliſhed which had been pre-determined by Omnipotence, for erecting the happy kingdom of the Prince of Peace; and, therefore, the Moſaic ceremonies were no longer obligatory, righteouſneſs alone being now required from the children of men.

Our Lord had performed ſeveral miracles at Jeruſalem, during the paſſover, at which the inhabitants of Galilee were preſent. His preaching was, therefore, at firſt attended with great ſucceſs, for they liſtened attentively to his doctrine, and received it with particular kindneſs and courteſy; eſpecially the people of Cana, where he had turned the water into wine.

During his reſidence in that city, a nobleman of Capernaum came to him, requeſting, with great humility and reverence, that he would come down and heal his ſon, who was at the point of death. Our bleſſed Lord readily complied with the latter part of his requeſt; but to remove a prejudice they had conceived, that it was neceſſary to be perſonally preſent, in order to reſtore the ſick perſon to health, refuſed to go down to Capernaum, diſmiſſing the father, with this aſſurance, that his ſon was reſtored to health, "Go thy way thy ſon liveth." The nobleman obeyed the word of Jeſus, and immediately departed for his own houſe; but before his arrival he was met by his ſervants, with the joyful news that his ſon was recovered. The father enquired at what time he was perceived to be better; and from their anſwer was ſatisfied, that immediately after the words were ſpoken by our Lord, the fever left him, and he was recovered in a miraculous manner. This amazing inſtance of his power and goodneſs abundantly convinced the nobleman and his family, that Jeſus was the true Meſſiah, the great Prophet ſo long promiſed to the world.

After ſome ſtay in the city and neighbourhood of Cana, Jeſus went to Nazareth, where he ſpent the greateſt part of his youth, and, as his conſtant cuſtom was, went to the ſynagogue on the ſabbath-day, and read that celebrated prediction of the Meſſiah in the prophet Iſaiah, "The ſpirit of the Lord is upon me, becauſe he

he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." *Luke* iv. 18, 19.

It should be remembered, that our blessed Saviour read this passage in the original Hebrew, which was then a dead language; and, as he had never been taught letters, could do it only by inspiration from above. But he did more; he explained the passage with such strength of reason, and beauty of expression, that the inhabitants of Nazareth, who well knew he had never been initiated into the rudiments of learning, heard him with astonishment. But as he had performed no miracle in their city, they were offended at him. Perhaps they thought the place of his residence should have been his peculiar care; and as he could, with a single word, heal the sick at a distance, not a single person in Nazareth should have been afflicted with any kind of disease. That they really entertained sentiments of this kind seems plain, from our Saviour's own words. "Ye will surely say to me, Physician heal thyself: whatever we have had done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country." Evidently alluding to the great and benevolent miracle he had wrought on the nobleman's son.

But the holy Jesus, by enumerating the miracles Elijah had done in behalf of the widow of Serepta, who was a heathen, and the inhabitant of an idolatrous city, in the time of famine, when many widows in Israel perished with hunger; and of Naaman the Syrian, who was cured of his leprosy by the prophet Elisha, when numbers of Jews, afflicted with the same loathsome disease, were suffered to continue in their uncleanness, sufficiently proved that the prophets had, on some extraordinary occasions, wrought miracles in favour of those whom the Israelites, from a fond conceit of their being the peculiar favourites of heaven, judged unworthy of such marks of particular favour. The council were so incensed at this reply, that forgetting the sanctity of the sabbath, they hurried him through the streets "to the brow of the hill whereon their city was built," intending to cast him headlong down the precipice; but the Son of God defeated their cruel intentions, by rendering himself invisible, and withdrawing from the fury of so wretched a people.

CHAP. VI.

Our Lord proceeds to Capernaum. Adds to the number of his Followers. Proclaims the Goſpel in Galilee. Preaches to a numerous Audience his well-known and excellent Diſcourſe upon the Mount.

THE great Redeemer, aggrieved by the cruel Nazarenes, departed from them, and fixed his habitation in Capernaum, the capital of Galilee, and, from being built on the borders of the lake of Geneſareth, a place highly convenient for his deſigns: for, beſides the numerous inhabitants of that city, the trading towns on the Lake were crowded with ſtrangers, who, after hearing the doctrine of the goſpel preached by Jeſus, would not fail to ſpread, in their reſpective countries, the happy tidings of ſalvation.

Though it was expedient that he ſhould ſpend a conſiderable time in preaching and working miracles, to confirm his miſſion, and inſtruct his diſciples in the doctrine they were afterwards to publiſh to the whole world, this could not be done at Jeruſalem, the reſidence of the Scribes and Phariſees, whoſe ambition would never have ſuffered ſo celebrated a teacher as Jeſus to reſide among them: theſe countries were, therefore, the only places where he could, for any time, take up his reſidence, and inſtruct the people in ſuch a manner, as to anſwer the great intention of his coming into the world.

If any ſhould enquire why he choſe Capernaum in preference to all the other places ſituated on the Lake of Geneſareth, we reply, becauſe he was certain of being favourably received by the inhabitants of that city. He had gained the friendſhip of the principal family, by reſtoring to health a favourite child, who, to all human appearance, was juſt ſtepping into the boſom of the grave. Nor was this family the only friends he had in that city; ſo ſtupendous a miracle could not fail of procuring the love and eſteem of all the relations of that noble family: beſides, ſo benevolent and ſurpriſing a miracle muſt have conciliated the reſpect of all the inhabitants of Capernaum, who could not be ignorant of ſo remarkable an event. And accordingly our Saviour ſpent here, and in other places bordering on the Lake, two or three years of his public life; ſo that the inhabitants of theſe parts enjoyed a conſiderable ſhare of the bleſſed company, and divine inſtructions of the Son of God.

It will prove acceptable here, it is preſumed, to give a ſhort deſcription of this celebrated Lake, called in the Old

Old Teſtament, the Sea of Chinnereth; but in the New it has three different appellations, being called the Sea of Gallilee, from the province of Galilee in general; the Sea of Tiberias, from a city of that name on its weſtern ſhore; and the Lake of Geneſareth, from a particular tract of Galilee, extending a conſide able way along its weſtern ſide.

According to Joſephus, it is an hundred furlongs in length, and forty in breadth. The bottom is of gravel, which renders the waters both of a good colour and taſte. It is ſofter than either fountain or river water; and, at the ſame time, ſo cold, that it will not grow warm, though expoſed to the rays of the ſun in the very hotteſt ſeaſon of the year. The river Jordan runs thro' the midſt of it, which ſtocks it with a great variety of fiſh, of a peculiar form and flavour not found in any other place.

The countries ſurrounding this Lake were large, fertile, and populous, eſpecially the two Galilees, which had a great many towns, and a multitude of villages, the leaſt of which contained fifteen hundred ſouls. On the eaſt ſide were the cities of Choraſin, Bethſaida, Gadara, and Hippon; on the weſt, Capernaum, Tiberias, and Tarrichea. And from all theſe advantages, it was a common ſaying among the Jews, that God loved the Sea of Galilee above all other ſeas. An obſervation ſtrictly juſt, if to theſe we add its greateſt advantage, namely, that this ſea, above all others, was frequently honoured with the divine preſence of the great Redeemer of Mankind, while he dwelt at Capernaum, and even once after he aroſe from the dead.

While Jeſus tarried at Capernaum he uſually taught in the ſynagogues on the ſabbath-day, preaching with ſuch energy of power as greatly aſtoniſhed the whole congregation.—He did not, however, conſtantly confine himſelf to that city, the adjacent country was often bleſſed with his preſence, and cheared with the heavenly words of his mouth.

In one of the neighbouring villages he called Simon and Andrew, who were following their occupation of fiſhing on the Lake, to accompany him. Theſe diſciples, who had before been acquainted with him, readily obeyed the heavenly mandate, and followed the Saviour of the world. Soon after he ſaw James and John, who were alſo fiſhing on the Lake, and called them alſo. Nor did they

heſitate

heſitate to follow the great Redeemer of Mankind; and, from their ready compliance, there is reaſon to believe that they, as well as Simon and Andrew, were acquainted with Jeſus at Jordan; unleſs we ſuppoſe, which is far from being improbable, that their readineſs proceeded from the ſecret energy of his power upon their minds. But however this may be, the four diſciples accompanied our Lord to Capernaum, and ſoon after to different parts of Galilee.

How long our Saviour was on this journey cannot be determined. All the evangeliſt's have mentioned is, that he wrought a great number of miracles on diſeaſed perſons; and that the fame of theſe wonderful works drew people from Galilee, Jeruſalem, Judea, and beyond Jordan. Nor was the knowledge of theſe miracles concealed from the heathens, particularly the inhabitants of Syria; for they alſo brought their ſick to Galilee to be healed by him. Conſequently, the time our bleſſed Redeemer ſpent in theſe tours muſt have been conſiderable, though the evangeliſts have ſaid very little concerning it.

But whatever time was ſpent in theſe benevolent actions, the prodigious multitudes which flocked to him from every quarter, moved his compaſſion towards thoſe who were bewildered in the darkneſs of ignorance, and determined him to preach to them "the words of eternal life."

For this good purpoſe he aſcended a mountain in that neighbourhood; and, placing himſelf on an eminence from whence he could be heard by the throngs of people attending him, he inculcated, in an amazingly pathetic manner, the moſt important points of religion. But, alas! they were coldly received, becauſe many of them were directly oppoſite to the ſtanding precepts delivered by the Scribes and Phariſees. Surely theſe people, who had ſeen the bleſſed Jeſus perform ſo many benevolent actions to the poor, the diſeaſed, and the maimed, might have entertained a more favourable opinion of his doctrine, and known that ſo compaſſionate and powerful a perſon muſt have been actuated by the ſpirit of God; and, conſequently, that the doctrine he taught was really divine.

He opened his excellent ſermon with the doctrine of happineſs, a ſubject which the teachers of wiſdom have always conſidered as the principal object in morals, and employed their utmoſt abilities to convey a clear idea of it to their diſciples, but differed

differed very remarkably with regard to the particulars in which it conſiſted. The Jews were, in general, perſuaded, that the enjoyments of ſenſe were the ſovereign good. Riches, conqueſt, liberty, mirth, women, fame, revenge, and other things of the ſame kind, afforded them ſuch pleaſures, that they wiſhed for no better in the Meſſiah's kingdom, which they all conſidered as a ſecular one; and that a golden, inſtead of a "ſceptre of righteouſneſs," would have been the "ſceptre of his kingdom." Nay, the very diſciples themſelves long retained this notion, and firſt followed him with a view of obtaining honours, profits, and pleaſures, in their poſts under him.

Our Lord and Maſter, therefore, to ſhew his hearers in general, and his diſciples in particular, the groſſneſs of their error, declared that the higheſt happineſs of men conſiſts in the graces of the ſpirit; becauſe, from the poſſeſſion and exerciſe of them, the pureſt pleaſures reſult; pleaſures which ſatisfy even the Almighty himſelf, and conſtitute his ineffable felicity. The rich, the great, the proud, ſaid our Lord, in whom the wiſdom of God was fully diſplayed, are not happy, as you imagine; they are always wiſhing for what they cannot obtain, and their diſappointments are poiſoned arrows feſtering in their boſoms. On the contrary, the poor in ſpirit are the truly happy, who diſcharge the duty of their ſtation, whatever it be, with virtue and integrity; and bleſs the omnipotent hand who faſhioned them in the womb, and guards them from all danger in this humble vale of ſorrow and diſtreſs; and though they are excluded from enjoying an earthly kingdom, yet they have a much better reſerved for them, eternal in the heavens. "Bleſſed are the poor in ſpirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The jocoſe and flighty are not the happy race of mortals: but, on the contrary, the afflicted, provided they rightly improve their afflictions; that is, if they are excited by them to mourn for their ſins, forſake their wicked courſes, and ſeek a better country. For they ſhall here enjoy the conſolation, that their ſins are forgiven; and, after paſſing through the valley of the ſhadow of death, the fruition of eternal joys. "Bleſſed are they that mourn: for they ſhall be comforted."

The truth of this heavenly aphoriſm is very evident; for what has ſo great a power to turn the feet of

the ſons of men into the path of virtue, as affliction? Has not affliction a natural tendency to give mankind a diſtaſte to the pleaſures of the world, and convince them they are nothing more than vanity and vexation of ſpirit; and, conſequently, to demonſtrate that they muſt ſeek for happineſs in things more ſolid and permanent than any in this vale of tears? Affliction awakens the moſt ſerious thoughts in the mind; compoſes it into a grave and ſettled frame, very different from the levity inſpired by proſperity; gives it a fellow feeling of the ſorrows of others; and makes it thoroughly ſenſible of the danger of departing from God, the ſource and centre of all its joys.

Nor are the paſſionate happy; but, on the contrary, the meek. Thoſe who have ſubdued their tempers can patiently bear provocation, and are ſtrangers to that deſtructive paſſion, envy. The meek ſhall inherit the choiceſt bleſſings of the preſent life; for, indeed, they principally flow from that benevolent and heavenly temper of mind. Meekneſs conſiſts in the moderation of our paſſions, which renders a perſon lovely and venerable in the eyes of his fellow-mortals; and thence he poſſeſſes their ſincere eſteem, while the paſſionate and envious man is conſidered as deſpicable, though adorned with the robe of honour, and dignified with the moſt ample profeſſions. "Bleſſed are the meek: for they ſhall inherit the earth."

Men, through vanity and blindneſs, conſider thoſe as happy, who enjoy the pleaſures of this life, by rioting in luxury and exceſs. But this is far from being the caſe; on the contrary, thoſe are the truly happy who have the moſt vehement deſire of treading the paths of virtue and religion. For they, by the aſſiſtance of the holy ſpirit, ſhall obtain every thing they deſire; ſhall be happy here in the practice of righteouſneſs; and after this tranſitory life is ended, ſhall be received into the bliſsful manſions of the heavenly Canaan.—"Bleſſed are they that hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs: for they ſhall be filled."

Reſentment of injuries is not a ſpring of happineſs, but forgiveneſs of them; and being of a humane and beneficent diſpoſition, rejoice when they can perform a benevolent action, eſpecially to their fellow-mortals in diſtreſs. The merciful ſhall ſee themſelves recompenſed even in this life; for they ſhall find, after many days, the bread they have caſt upon

upon the waters of affliction, returned tenfold into their boſom. And ſurely nothing can ſurpaſs the pleaſure felt by a generous mind, at having relieved a brother, when preſſed beneath a load of misfortunes; the pleaſure is divine; it is god-like!—"Bleſſed are the merciful: for they ſhall obtain mercy."

From indulgences in Senſuality, no comfort can ariſe: it is the lot of thoſe who have mortified their carnal appetites, to enjoy an inward purity of mind. With what delight do we behold the glories of the ſun, and contemplate the beautiful ſcenes of nature that ſurround us! But what proportion has this to the ineffable delights that muſt fill the minds of thoſe who behold the great Creator himſelf, who called the whole univerſe from nothing, and ſtill ſupports it with the word of his power?—"Bleſſed are the pure in heart: for they ſhall ſee God."

The tyrants and conquerors of the earth, who diſturb the peace of mankind, are far from happy. It falls to the ſhare of thoſe who love their fellow-creatures, and do all in their power to promote peace and harmony among the children of men. For they imitate the greateſt perfection in their Maker; and therefore ſhall be acknowledged by him for his children, and participate of his happineſs. "Bleſſed are the peace-makers: for they ſhall be called the children of God."

Nor does happineſs conſiſt in liberty and eaſe, if thoſe privileges are purchaſed at the expence of virtue; it is the conſequence of a perſecution for conſcience ſake; for thoſe who have ſuffered the ſevereſt trial that human nature is capable of ſuſtaining, ſhall be honoured with the higheſt rewards in the bliſsful manſions of eternity. "Bleſſed are they who are perſecuted for righteouſneſs ſake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Contentment is not to be expected from the applauſe of the world; but will be the portion of thoſe who are falſely reviled for their righteouſneſs, and ſhare in the affronts offered to God himſelf; for by theſe perſecutions the prophets of all ages have been diſtinguiſhed. "Bleſſed are ye when men ſhall revile you, and perſecute you, and ſhall ſay all manner of evil againſt you falſely for my ſake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for ſo perſecuted they the prophets which were before you." *Matt.* v. 11. 12.

Theſe are the declarations, with regard to happineſs, made by the

Son

Son of God; and ſurely we ought to confide in the words of him who came down from heaven for the expreſs purpoſe of reclaiming the wicked, and gaining for them an inheritance in the heavenly kingdom, by preaching the doctrine of repentance, and the abſolute neceſſity they were under to practice every moral duty.

Having ſhewn in what true happineſs conſiſted, our Saviour addreſſed himſelf to his diſciples, and explained their duty as the teachers appointed to conduct others in the paths that lead to eternal felicity: excited them to diligence in diſpenſing the ſalutary influences of their doctrine and example, that their hearers might honour and praiſe the great Creator of heaven and earth, who had been ſo kind to the children of men.

As his definition of happineſs was very different from what the Jews were accuſtomed to hear from the Scribes and Phariſees, he thought proper to declare, that he was not come to deſtroy the moral precepts contained in the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfil or confirm them.

Nothing is ſo ſtedfaſt as the eternal truths of morality; the heavens may paſs away, and the whole frame of nature be diſſolved, but the rules of righteouſneſs ſhall remain immutable and immortal. And, therefore, he ordered his diſciples, on the ſevereſt penalties, both to enforce by preaching and example, the ſtrict obſervation of all the moral precepts contained in the ſacred writings; and that in a much greater latitude than they were taken by the teachers of Iſrael. And, in conſideration of the frailties of human nature, taught them that excellent form of prayer, which has been uſed by Chriſtians of all denominations to this very day.

Our Father who art in heaven, &c.

If earthly parents are called fathers, the Almighty has the beſt title from every creature, and particularly from men, being the father of their ſpirits, the maker of their bodies, and the continual preſerver of both.

Father, is the moſt magnificent title invented by philoſophers or poets, in honour of their gods. It conveys the moſt lovely idea poſſible to be conceived by the human breaſt. As it is uſed by mankind in general, it marks the eſſential character of the true God, namely, that he is the firſt cauſe of all things, or the author of their being; and, at the ſame time, conveys a ſtrong idea of the tender love he bears to his creatures, whom he nouriſhes with an affection, and protects with a watchfulneſs, infinitely

nitely ſuperior to that of any earthly parent. The name of Father alſo teaches us, that we owe our being to God, points out his goodneſs and mercy in upholding us, and expreſſes his power in giving us the things we aſk; none of which are more difficult than creation. Nor is this all. We are likewiſe taught to give the great God the title of Father, that our ſenſe of the tender relation in which he ſtands to us may be confirmed, our faith in his power and goodneſs ſtrengthened, our hopes of obtaining what we aſk in prayer cheriſhed, and our deſire of obeying and imitating him quickened; for the light of nature teaches us, that it is diſgraceful in children to degenerate from their parents, and that they cannot commit a greater crime than to diſobey the commands of an indulgent father.

Laſtly. We are commanded to call him Father in the plural number, and that even in our ſecret addreſſes to the throne of grace, to put us in mind that we are all brethren, the children of one common parent; and that we ought to love one another with ſincerity, as we pray, not for ourſelves only, but for all the human race.

Who art in heaven. Theſe words do not ſuppoſe the preſence of God confined: he is preſent every where; about our paths, and about our bed, and narrowly inſpecteth every action of the ſons of men. But they expreſs his majeſty and power, and diſtinguiſh him from thoſe we call fathers upon earth, and from falſe gods which are not in heaven, the happy manſions of bliſs and felicity, where the Almighty, who is eſſentially preſent in every part of the univerſe, gives more eſpecial manifeſtations of his preſence to ſuch of his creatures as he hath exalted to ſhare with him in the eternal felicities of the heavenly Jeruſalem.

Hallowed be thy name. By the name of God, the Hebrews underſtood God himſelf, his attributes, and his works; and, therefore, the meaning of the petition is, May thy exiſtence be univerſally believed, thy preſence loved and imitated, thy works admired, thy ſupremacy over all things acknowledged, thy providence reverenced and confided in! May all the ſons of men think ſo highly of his divine Majeſty, of his attributes of his works; and may we ſo expreſs our veneration of God, that his glory may be manifeſted in every corner of the world!

Thy kingdom come. Let the king-

dom of the Meſſiah, or the goſpel diſpenſation be extended to the utmoſt parts of the earth, that all the children of men "may become one fold under one ſhepherd, Jeſus Chriſt the righteous."

Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. May thy will, O thou great Father of the Univerſe, be done upon us, that by the light of thy glorious goſpel we may be enabled to imitate the angels of light, by giving as ſincere, univerſal, and conſtant obedience to thy divine commands, as the imperfection of human nature will permit.

Give us this day our daily bread. Give us, from time to time, ſuch wholeſome and proper food, that we may be enabled to worſhip thee with, chearfulneſs and vigour.

And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. The great God, as ſupreme governor of the univerſe, has a right to ſupport his government, by puniſhing thoſe who tranſgreſs his laws. The ſuffering of puniſhment, therefore, is a debt which ſinners owe to the divine juſtice: ſo that when we aſk God in prayer to forgive our debts, we beg that he would be mercifully pleaſed to remit the puniſhment of all our ſins; and that laying aſide his diſpleaſure, he would receive us into favour, and bleſs us with life eternal. In this petition, therefore, we confeſs our ſins, and expreſs the ſenſe we have of their guilt; namely, that they deſerve death; and ſurely nothing can be more proper than ſuch a confeſſion in our addreſſes to God; becauſe humility, and ſenſe of our own unworthineſs, when we aſk favours of the Almighty, whether ſpiritual or temporal, have a tendency to augment the goodneſs of God in beſtowing them upon us.

The terms of this petition are worthy our notice; *Forgive us only as we forgive.* We muſt forgive others, if we hope ourſelves to be forgiven; and are permitted to crave from God ſuch forgiveneſs only as we grant to others; ſo that, if we do not forgive even our enemies, we ſeriouſly and ſolemnly implore the Almighty to condemn us to the puniſhments of eternal death. How remarkably careful, therefore, ſhould men be to purge their hearts from all rancour and malice, before they venture into the temple of the Almighty God, to offer up their prayers to the throne of grace!

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. That is, do not lead us into ſuch temptations as

as are too hard for human nature; but deliver us, by ſome means, from the evil; either by removing the temptation, or increaſing our ſtrength to reſiſt it. This petition teaches us to preſerve a ſenſe of our own inability to repel and overcome the ſolicitations of the world, and of the neceſſity there is of our receiving aſſiſtance from above, both to regulate our paſſions, and to conquer the difficulties of a religious life.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, for ever. Becauſe the government of the univerſe is thine for ever, and thou alone poſſeſſeſt the power of creating and upholding all things; and becauſe the glory of thine infinite perfections remains eternally with thee; therefore, all men ought to hallow thy name, ſubmit themſelves to thy government, and perform thy will. And in a humble ſenſe of their dependance, ſeek from thee the ſupply of their wants, the pardon of their ſins, and the kind protection of thy providence.

This is emphatically called the Lord's prayer, becauſe delivered by the Son of God himſelf; and therefore we ſhould do well to underſtand it thoroughly, that when we enter the temple of the Lord, and addreſs him in ſolemn prayer, we may have hopes that he will grant our petitions. And, above all, not to harbour in our breaſts the leaſt envy or malice againſt any who may have offended us; for it is only on a ſuppoſition that we have forgiven others, that we have the leaſt reaſon to hope for obtaining forgiveneſs from the great Creator.

The conciſeneſs and ſimplicity of this prayer of our Lord's, ought to be an example unto us, in all our Petitions to the Father Almighty, that we obſerve the ſame uniformity and order; and not to multiply words to the excluſion of meaning, as is ſometimes the caſe.

The divine preacher proceeded to conſider the great duty of faſting, in which he directed them not to follow the hypocrites in diſfiguring their faces, and in cloathing themſelves in the melancholy weeds of ſorrow; but to be chiefly ſolicitous to appear before God as one that truly faſteth. Then will the Almighty, who conſtantly ſurrounds us, and is acquainted with even the moſt ſecret thoughts of our hearts, openly beſtow upon us the rewards of a true penitent, whoſe mortification, contrition, and humility, he can diſcern without the external appearances of ſorrow and repentance. It muſt, however, be remembered

membered, that our bleſſed Saviour is here ſpeaking of private faſting, and to this alone his directions are to be applied; for when we are called upon to mourn over the public ſins or calamities, it ought to be performed in the moſt public manner.

Heavenly-mindedneſs was the next virtue inculcated by the bleſſed Jeſus; and this he recommended with a peculiar earneſtneſs, becauſe the Jewiſh doctors were, in general, ſtrangers to this virtue, in which he was deſirous his followers ſhould be cloathed, as being the moſt excellent ornament for a teacher of righteouſneſs.

This virtue is ſtrenuouſly recommended by our bleſſed Saviour, by ſhewing the deformity of its oppoſite, covetouſneſs, which has only periſhable things for its object.—"Lay not up for yourſelves treaſures upon earth, where moth and ruſt doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and ſteal. But lay up for yourſelves treaſures in heaven, where neither moth nor ruſt doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break thro' nor ſteal. For where your treaſure is, there will your heart be alſo." *Matt.* vi. 19, 20, 21.

More ſolid happineſs will accrue from depoſiting your treaſures in the chambers of the courts of heaven, than in this earthly habitation of clay, where they are ſubject to a thouſand diſaſters; and even, at beſt, can remain only for a ſhort ſeries of years; whereas, thoſe laid up in the heavenly Jeruſalem are permanent, ſubject to no accident, and will purchaſe "a crown of glory that fadeth not away eternal in the heavens." Nor let any man be ſo fooliſh as to think he can place his heart on the happineſs of a future ſtate, when his treaſures are depoſited in this vale of miſery; for wherever are laid up the goods which his ſoul deſireth, there his heart and affections will alſo remain. If, therefore, ye are deſirous of ſharing in the joys of eternity, you muſt lay up your treaſures in the "manſions of my father's kingdom."

Leſt they ſhould imagine it was poſſible to be both heavenly-minded and covetous, at the ſame time, he aſſured them that this was full as abſurd as to imagine a perſon could, at the ſame time, ſerve, and divide his affections equally, between two maſters of oppoſite characters. "No man can ſerve two maſters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or elſe he will hold to the one and deſpiſe the other. Ye cannot ſerve God and mammon. Matt. iv. 24.

To ſtrengthen this doctrine, he added a few plain and evident inſtances of the power, perfection, and extent of God's providence, in which his tender care for the leaſt and weakeſt of his creatures ſhines with a remarkable luſtre, demonſtrating, the wiſe and parental attention of the Deity to all the creatures of his hand. He deſired them to obſerve the birds of the air, the lilies, and even the graſs of the field; leading his moſt illiterate hearers to form a more elevated and extenſive idea of the divine government than the philoſophers had attained, who, tho' they allowed, in general, that the world was governed by God, had very confuſed notions of his providence with regard to every individual creature and action. He taught them that the Almighty Father of the whole, is the guardian and protector of every being in the univerſe; that every action is ſubject to his will, and that nothing is left to the blind determination of chance.

And if we direct our lives according to the divine will, we have ſurely no reaſon to be anxious about the neceſſaries of life. "Behold (ſays the bleſſed Jeſus) the fowls of the air: for they ſow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye much better than they?" *Matt.* vi. 26. Are not the fowls of the air, who have no concern for future wants, fed and nouriſhed by the beneficent hand of your heavenly Father; and can ye doubt that man, whom he hath made the lord of the whole earth, ſhall be deſtitute of his tender care? "And why take ye thought for raiment? Conſider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they ſpin. And yet I ſay unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of theſe." *Matt.* vi. 28, 29. Conſider the lilies that ſo finely adorn the adjacent fields; how beautiful their form! how lively their colours! how fragrant their ſcent! The productions of art but faintly imitate them. Even Solomon himſelf, dreſſed in his ſplendid robes of royalty, was but meanly adorned in compariſon of theſe. And ſurely if Omnipotence thus beautifully cloaths the inanimate productions of the fields, whoſe duration is remarkably tranſient and uncertain, you have not the leaſt reaſon to doubt but he will bleſs your honeſt endeavours, and ſend you proper cloathing: are ye not of infinitely more value than they?

Be you anxiouſly ſolicitous to obtain the happineſs of the life to come; and all the good things of this life ſhall, in the courſe of the divine providence, be added unto you.

Our Lord then prohibited all raſh and uncharitable cenſure, either with regard to the characters of others in general, or of their actions in particular; leſt, in ſo doing, both God and man reſent the injury. If you judge charitably, ſays the meek and benevolent Redeemer of the human race, making proper allowances for the frailties of human nature, and are ready to pity and pardon their faults, both your heavenly Father, and man, will deal with you after the ſame manner. But if you always put the harſheſt conſtruction upon every action, and are not touched with a feeling of your brother's infirmities, nor ſhew any mercy in the opinions you form of his character and actions, no mercy will be ſhewn you either from Omnipotence, or the ſons of men. God will inflict on you the puniſhments you deſerve, and the world will be ſure to retaliate the injury.—"Judge not that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye ſhall be judged: and with what meaſure ye mete, it ſhall be meaſured to you again." *Matt.* vii. 1, 2.

The bleſſed Jeſus, in his pious diſcourſe, told them to inculcate an entire reformation in themſelves, a particular abſolutely neceſſary in thoſe whoſe office it is reprove and reform their brethren. And ſurely nothing can be more prepoſterous, than to condemn in others what we practice ourſelves; or to ſet up for reformers of the world, when we are ourſelves contaminated with the moſt enormous vices. With what countenance can we undertake to rebuke others for ſmall faults, when we are ourſelves plunged in the moſt deteſtable pollutions? Well might the Redeemer of the world ſay, "Thou hypocrite, firſt caſt out the beam out of thine own eye; and then ſhalt thou ſee clearly to caſt out the mote out of thy brother's eye." *Matt.* vii. 4.

Theſe are the important points of doctrine recommended by the infallible Preacher, as neceſſary to the teachers of the goſpel of peace; but it is not enough that they know and practiſe the ſeveral branches of their duty: to extend the happy doctrines among mankind, there muſt alſo be a readineſs, and even a deſire in the people, to receive them; for if theſe be wanting, all attempts to ſpread theſe heavenly truths will prove abortive; and, therefore, our bleſſed Saviour

viour added, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither caſt ye your pearls before ſwine, leſt they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rent you." *Matt.* vii. 6. Do not reprove men of a ſnarling diſpoſition, as the attempt, inſtead of having the happy effects intended, will but provoke them to purſue their wickedneſs with greater boldneſs than ever. You may warn others againſt their company and example; you may weep over them, and you may pray to your heavenly Father for them; but you cannot reprove them with ſafety, or any hope of ſucceſs.

Leſt the diſciples ſhould think that theſe precepts were not to be attained by human nature, he directed them to apply to God for the aſſiſtance of his Spirit, together with all other bleſſings neceſſary to their ſalvation; aſſuring them, that if they aſked with earneſtneſs and perſeverence, the Father of mercies would not fail to anſwer their requeſts, and give them whatever they deſired. Adding the nobleſt precept of morality that was ever delivered by any teacher. "All things whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do unto you, do ye even ſo to them: for this is the law and the prophets. *Matt.* vii. 12. How clear a rule of duty is this, and how eaſy and applicable to practice! Look into your own breaſt, and do as you would be done by, in every condition.

Having enforced theſe heavenly precepts, he exhorted them to place a humble dependence on the ſpirit, to ſtrive to practice the precepts of religion, however difficult the taſk may appear. "Enter ye in at the ſtrait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to deſtruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Becauſe ſtrait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." *Matt.* vii. 13, 14.—How ſtrait indeed is the gate, how narrow the way that leadeth to life! In the way nothing is to be found that flatters the fleſh, but many things that has a tendency to mortify it, poverty, faſting, watching, injuries, chaſtity, ſobriety. And with regard to the gate, it receives none that are puffed up with the glory of this life; none that are elated and blown up with pride; none that are diſtended with luxury. It does not admit thoſe that are laden with the caſket of riches, or encumbered with the goods of this world. None can paſs thro' it but thoſe who are ſtripped of all worldly luſts, and who, having put

off

off their bodies, are, if I may be allowed the expreſſion, emaciated into ſpirits. There is, however, no reaſon for us to deſpair of entering this heavenly portal; if we ſincerely endeavour, the aſſiſtances of the Holy Spirit will make us *more than conquerors*; and we ſhall ſafely paſs through the *ſtrait gate*, and purſue our journey with eaſe along the *narrow path*, till we arive at the bliſsful manſions of the heavenly Canaan.

But, leſt evil-minded men, under the maſk of piety and religion, ſhould endeavour to draw them from the paths of righteouſneſs, our bleſſed Saviour cautioned his diſciples to beware of ſuch perſons, and carefully make the ſtricteſt ſcrutiny into their lives and doctrines.

Our Lord cloſed his ſermon with the parable of the houſes built on different foundations; intimating, that the bare knowledge, or the ſimple hearing of the moſt divine leſſons of morality ever delivered, nay, even the belief of theſe inſtructions, without the practice of them, is of no manner of importance.

Religion alone is the foundation which can ſo firmly eſtabliſh us, that we cannot be ſhaken by all the tempeſt of afflictions, temptations, and perſecutions of the preſent age! It is this foundation alone, which, like a flinty rock, or the eternal baſis of the mountains, can ſupport us in the day of trial. This alone can enable us to fruſtrate the attempts of men and devils, and patiently endure all the troubles of mortality.

CHAP. VII.

Our Lord cures the Leproſy and Palſy. Caſts out a Devil. Succours the Mother-in-law of Peter; and afterwards purſues his Journey through the Country of Galilee.

THE great Preacher of Iſrael having finiſhed his excellent diſcourſe, came down from the mountain, ſurrounded by a multitude of people, who had liſtened with aſtoniſhment to the doctrines he delivered, which were ſoon confirmed by divers miracles. A leper met him in his way to Capernaum, and being doubtleſs acquainted with the wonderous works he had already performed, threw himſelf, with great humility, before the Son of God, uſing this remarkable expreſſion, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canſt make me clean."

The ſpecies of leproſy common among the Jews, and other eaſtern nations, was equally nauſeous and infectious; but this was ſo far from preventing the bleſſed Jeſus from approaching ſo loathſome an object, that

that it increaſed his pity; he even touched him; but, inſtead of being polluted himſelf, the leper was inſtantly cleanſed, and he departed glorifying God.

The evangeliſt adds, that Jeſus forbade him to tell any perſon what had been done, but repair immediately to the prieſt, and offer the gift commanded by Moſes.

Having effected the cure on the leper, our bleſſed Lord proceeded to Capernaum; but as he entered the city, he was met by a Roman centurion, who repreſented to him, in the moſt pathetic manner, the deplorable condition of his ſon, who was grievouſly afflicted with a palſy. The compaſſionate Redeemer of the world liſtened attentively to his complaint, and immediately told him, he would come and heal him. The centurion thought this too great a condeſcenſion to one who was not of the ſeed of Jacob, and therefore told him, that he did not mean he ſhould give himſelf the trouble of going to his houſe, as this was an honour he had not the leaſt reaſon to expect, he being aſſured that his word alone would be ſufficient; diſeaſes and devils being as much ſubject to his commands, as his ſoldiers were to him.

Our Lord was amazed at theſe words. Not that he was ignorant of the centurion's faith, or the baſis on which it was built; he well knew the thoughts of his heart long before he uttered his requeſt; but he was filled with admiration at the exalted idea the Roman officer had conceived of his power; and to make this faith the more conſpicuous, he gave it the praiſe it ſo juſtly deſerved. "Verily I ſay unto you, I have not found ſo great faith, no not in Iſrael."

This centurion doubtleſs relied on the miracle Jeſus had before wrought upon the nobleman's ſon; but the excellency and peculiarity of it conſiſted in applying the moſt grand ideas of ſuperior power to Jeſus, who, according to outward appearance, was only one of the ſons of men.

This exalted faith induced the bleſſed Jeſus to declare the gracious intentions of his Almighty Father, with regard to the Gentiles, namely, that he would as readily accept their faith as that of the Jews, and place them with Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven, while thoſe who boaſted of being the offſpring of theſe great patriarchs, but fell far ſhort of the heathens in faith, ſhould be excluded from the bliſsful ſeats of Paradiſe. "And I ſay unto you, that many ſhall come from the

east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." *Matt.* viii. 11, 12.

Having thus addressed the multitude, the blessed Jesus turned himself to the centurion, and said, "Go thy way, and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee." Though the idea thou hast conceived of my power is just, though remarkably great, as a reward for thy faith, I grant the petition thou had asked of me. And, the evangelist adds, "his servant was healed in the self-same hour." *Matt.* viii. 13.

On the succeeding sabbath, our Saviour went into the Jewish synagogue at Capernaum, and taught the people, delivering his instructions in so graceful and elegant a manner, that they were all astonished; and to increase their admiration, one of the congregation, possessed of an unclean spirit, cried out in a terrible manner, "Let us alone, what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the holy one of God." *Mark* i. 24.

But the blessed Jesus, who wanted the testimony of no such confessors, commanded him to keep silence, and immediately come out of the man; which command the evil spirit instantly obeyed, to the great surprise and astonishment of all the spectators.

The enemies of the gospel have always endeavoured to depreciate our Saviour's miracles, pretending that no more is meant by a person possessed of the devil, than that he was afflicted with some loathsome disease; and that because sepulchres were considered as polluted places; and, therefore whenever any melancholy person frequented them, they were said to be possessed with unclean spirits. They add, that it will be difficult to assign a reason why demons were, at this time, more numerous in Judea than any other country.

To the first of these objections, namely, that the demoniacs were, in reality, nothing more than persons afflicted with some loathsome disease, we reply, it is evidently false; the evangelist having taken care to be very particular on this head. "They brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them." *Matt.* iv. 24. "He gave

gave to the apoſtles power againſt unclean ſpirits, to caſt them out, and to heal all manner of ſickneſs, and all manner of diſeaſe." *Matt.* x. 1. And accordingly, "he healed many that were ſick of divers diſeaſes, and caſt out many devils." *Mark* i. 34. It is therefore evident, that thoſe ſaid to be poſſeſſed with unclean ſpirits were different from thoſe that had diſeaſes. Let us therefore paſs to the ſecond objection, and ſee whether we cannot give a ſatisfactory reaſon why demons were, at this time, more numerous in Judea, than in any other country.

That there were evil ſpirits of this kind is abundantly evident from the holy ſcriptures, the ſacred penmen having taken care to acquaint us with their origin and fall, their names and numbers, their government and orders, their malicious deſigns and employments, with ſeveral other particulars. So that no one can doubt of the exiſtence of demons, who believes theſe holy oracles to be the word of God. And it is equally evident, both from prophane and ſacred hiſtory, that before our Saviour's advent, great numbers of men were poſſeſſed of thoſe evil ſpirits.

The truth is, theſe ſpirits of darkneſs had, at this time, taken poſſeſſion of ſo large a ſhare of the world, that they began to rival the Almighty in his worſhip; and, therefore, one end of the incarnation of the Son of God, was, "that he might deſtroy the works of the devil." And hence we may eaſily ſee the reaſon why Omnipotence ſuffered theſe apoſtate ſpirits to appear ſo frequently in Judea at the time of our Saviour's miniſtry, namely, that the Son of God might, in a more ſignal manner, triumph over all the powers of darkneſs, and convince mankind that he was truly the Saviour of the world.

But to return. The fame of this miracle was ſoon ſpread over the neighbouring country. He had before healed the ſick, and done many other wonderful things: but to command with authority, the unclean ſpirits to quit their reſidence; and to ſee theſe enemies to mankind readily obey his voice, filled them with aſtoniſhment, and abundantly convinced them, that he was filled with the ſpirit of God.

It has been aſked, why the devil, who, it is plain from the text, knew our Saviour to be the Son of God, ſhould put it into the heart of Judas to betray him, ſince this was the proper method of accompliſhing the redemption of mankind? But the anſwer

ſwer to this is obvious and eaſy. The devil, doubtleſs, knew Jeſus to be the Meſſiah; but he was ignorant of the myſtery of man's redemption. And, therefore, though he was not ignorant of his divinity, yet he might be ſo far infatuated as to think, that by deſtroying his body, he ſhould defeat the great deſign of Omnipotence. For however extenſive we may ſuppoſe his intellectual faculties to be, yet the wonderful work of man's redemption, by the death of Chriſt, was a myſtery that no finite underſtanding could comprehend, till God himſelf was pleaſed to reveal it.

Having performed this aſtoniſhing miracle in the ſynagogue, our Lord retired to Peter's houſe, where he found his wife's mother ſick of a fever; but on his taking her by the hand, ſhe was immediately reſtored to her former health, and aroſe from the bed, and "miniſtered unto him."

The evangeliſt St. Luke, in his account of this miraculous cure, tells us, that he "rebuked the fever." *Luke* iv. 39. to intimate his authority over all diſeaſes, being analogous to the figurative expreſſions in ſcripture, which not only repreſent all inanimate creatures as ſervants to the Almighty, but diſeaſes, famine, peſtilence, and the like, as executioners waiting on him to inflict puniſhment on rebellious ſinners. "Before him went the peſtilence, and burning diſeaſes went forth at his feet."

The fame of theſe miracles was ſoon ſpread through the city; and as ſoon as the Sabbath was over, which ended at the ſetting of the ſun, the whole city was gathered together about Peter's houſe, and with them great numbers of ſick perſons, and thoſe poſſeſſed with devils. The ſight of ſo many human objects in diſtreſs excited the pity of this heavenly phyſician; ſo that he immediately healed them all. And thus was the prophecy of Iſaiah fulfilled, "Himſelf took our infirmities, and bare our ſickneſſes."

But the vaſt concourſe of people that now gathered round him in Capernaum began to be troubleſome, and he retired into a deſert, whither the multitude ſoon followed him, and intreated him never to depart from them. But as this requeſt was inconſiſtent with the deſign of his miſſion, he, for the firſt time, refuſed their requeſt, "and preached in the ſynagogues of Galilee." *Luke* iv. 44.

CHAP. VIII.

Jeſus confirms his Miſſion by producing a miraculous Draught of Fiſhes. Curing the Leproſy

proſy a ſecond Time. Appeaſing the boiſterous Waves. Caſting Devils out of divers Perſons grievouſly poſſeſſed.

OUR bleſſed Lord, having ſpread his doctrine throughout Galilee, returned to Capernaum, followed by ſuch throngs of people, that he found it neceſſary to ſtep into Peter's ſhip; from whence he taught the multitude who ſtood on the ſhore liſtening, with great attention to his doctrine.

Having concluded his ſermon, he turned himſelf to Simon Peter, deſiring him to launch out farther from the ſhore, and let down his net. On which the diſciple told him of the unſucceſsful pains they had taken during the whole night; but added, that he would, in obedience to his command, make one trial more. Nor had he any cauſe to repent; for the net was no ſooner in the lake, than they found it ſo full of large fiſhes, that it was in danger of breaking.

This ſucceſs, after ſuch ill fortune, aſtoniſhed Peter, who falling down at the feet of Jeſus, cried out, "Depart from me, for I am a ſinful man, O Lord." He was conſcious of the many ſins he had been guilty of, and therefore afraid of being in the company of ſo divine a perſon, leſt ſome infirmity, or offence, might have expoſed him to more than ordinary chaſtiſement.

But the benevolent Redeemer of mankind encouraged his fears, and told him, that from henceforth the employments of him and his companions ſhould be far more noble: they ſhould catch men; that is, they ſhould turn them from the crooked paths of iniquity, to the ſtrait road leading to the heavenly manſions.

This miracle was conſidered by the diſciples as a plainer manifeſtation of his being the Son of God, than thoſe they had ſeen him perform on the ſick in the city and neighbourhood of Capernaum. It was a received opinion among the Jews, that all good men, by prayers, and laying their hands on the ſick, were able to cure certain diſeaſes, and even to caſt out devils; but that the creatures inhabiting the elements of air or water, were ſubject only to the commands of Omnipotence himſelf: conſequently, the power ſhewn by our bleſſed Saviour on this occaſion, undeniably proved him to be divine. And, accordingly, this demonſtration of his power rendered theſe diſciples, for the future, abſolutely devoted to his will; and, in the greatneſs of their admiration they abandoned e-

very thing, and followed the Saviour of the world.

The diſciples being thus attached to their divine maſter, followed him through the cities of Galilee, where, according to his uſual cuſtom, he preached the goſpel of the kingdom of God, and confirmed the doctrines he delivered with aſtoniſhing miracles.

In one of the cities through which he paſſed, he found "a man full of leproſy, who ſeeing Jeſus, fell on his face, and beſought him, ſaying, Lord, if thou wilt thou canſt make me clean." *Luke* v. 12.

It was the cuſtom in Judea for the prieſts to baniſh from Society thoſe perſons who were afflicted with the contagious ſpecies of leproſy. The diſeaſe of this perſon, therefore, was of a leſs peſtilent kind, as he was ſuffered to be permitted to enjoy the converſation of men. His caſe, however, excited the pity of the compaſſionate Jeſus, who immediately cleanſed him, ordered him to repair to Jeruſalem, and, after ſhewing himſelf to the prieſt, offer the gifts commanded by Moſes; giving him the ſame admonition he had done to others, namely, not to tell any man what had been done for him. But the bleſſing he had received was ſo great and unexpected, that, inſtead of concealing, he publiſhed every where the great things Jeſus had done for him; which brought ſuch crowds to the Son of God, that he was obliged to retire from Capernaum into the Wilderneſs, to refreſh his body with reſt, and his ſpirit with prayer and meditation.

The generality of commentators ſuppoſe that this leper, and the other mentioned in the foregoing chapter, are one and the ſame perſon; but this is a miſtake. The former was cured in the fields, the latter in the city. After cleanſing the firſt, Jeſus went to Capernaum, and healed the Centurion's ſon; but, after curing the latter, he retired in the Wilderneſs, to ſhun the prodigious crowds, which ſoon gathered round him, from the leper's publiſhing every where the miracle Jeſus had wrought for him.

If the curious ſhould wiſh to enquire, why our bleſſed Saviour ſo often commanded the people to conceal his miracles? We anſwer them: his modeſty and humility would not ſuffer that his works ſhould have the leaſt appearance of oſtentation; nor the Jews to have the leaſt pretence for accuſing him of ſeeking his own glory. Nor was it proper, at this time,

time, to irritate the Scribes and Phariſees. He well knew, that in a certain determinate ſpace of time they would bring about what had been determined concerning him in the council of Omnipotence. In the mean time, "he was to work the works of him that ſent him while it was day." *John* ix. 4. And to propogate his goſpel as much as poſſible both among the Jews and Gentiles; which could not have been ſo conveniently performed, if the greatneſs of his miracles had once provoked the malice and envy of his enemies, to exert their utmoſt power againſt him. He likewiſe knew the mad, capricious humour of the multitude, and had reaſon to apprehend "that they might come and take him away by force, and make him king," *John* vi. 15. if all his miracles had been blazed abroad, before he had ſufficiently inſtructed them in the ſpiritual nature of his kingdom, and that his throne was not to be eſtabliſhed in the earthly, but in the heavenly Jeruſalem.

From theſe inſtances we ſee that the bleſſed Jeſus did not, without ſufficient reaſon, deſire his miracles to be concealed. The fame of this ſingle miracle being ſpread through the neighbouring countries brought ſuch multitudes of people to Capernaum, that as we have already obſerved, he was obliged to retire into a ſolitary part of the neighbouring wilderneſs. Nor could he long enjoy the repoſe of tranquility he ſought, even in this thirſty waſte; the people ſoon diſcovered the place of his retreat, and flocked to him from every quarter.

Our bleſſed Lord, finding all his endeavours to conceal himſelf in the deſert would be in vain, ordered his diſciples to accompany him to the other ſide of the lake: upon which a certain Scribe, who happened to be preſent, declared he would follow him; but Jeſus who well knew that his deſire was only to gain the profits and advantages of an earthly kingdom, which he ſuppoſed the Meſſiah would eſtabliſh, told him, if he intended nothing more by following him, than to improve his worldly fortune, he would find himſelf wretchedly miſtaken. "The foxes have holes, (ſaid the bleſſed Jeſus to this teacher of Iſrael) and the birds of the air have neſts; but the ſon of man hath not where to lay his head." *Matt.* viii. 20.

The diſciples having prepared the ſhip, took on board their Maſter, and departed for the other ſide of the lake,

ſake, attended by many boats full of people, who were deſirous of hearing his heavenly diſcourſes, and being ſpectators of his aſtoniſhing works. But Jeſus, being fatigued with the labours of the day, ſat himſelf down at the ſtern of the ſhip, and fell aſleep.

The weather, which had till now been calm and ſerene, ſuddenly changed. A terrible ſtorm came on, and the riſing waves daſhed impetuouſly againſt the ſhip, threatening every moment to bury them all in the bowels of the deep. The darkneſs of the night increaſed the horrors of the tempeſt. Now they were carried on the top of the mountainous wave, and ſeemed to touch the ſkies; then plunged to the bottom of the deep, while the foaming billows roared horribly above them. In vain the diſciples exerted their utmoſt ſtrength; the ſtorm continued to increaſe, and baffled all the efforts of human ſtrength. The waves broke over the ſhip, the water ruſhed in, and ſhe began to ſink. All hopes of eſcaping were vaniſhed; deſpair ſeized every individual; and they were on the brink of periſhing, when they ran to Jeſus, crying out, *Maſter, Maſter, we periſh!* Their vehement cries rouſed him from his ſleep. He raiſed his hand, ſo often employed in acts of mercy and benevolence, and, with a ſtern and awful voice, rebuked the boiſterous element. The raging ſea inſtantly obeyed his command. The ærial torrent ſtopped ſhort in its impetuous courſe, and became ſilent as the grave, while the mountainous waves ſunk at once into their beds, and the ſurface of the deep became as ſmooth as poliſhed marble.

The diſciples had before ſeen their great Maſter perform many miracles; and therefore had abundant reaſon to rely wholly on his power and goodneſs. They ſhould have conſidered that he who could by his word reſtore the ſick, and bring the inhabitants of the ſea to their nets, could with the ſame eaſe have ſupported them on the ſurface of the deep, had the ſhip ſunk beneath them, and carried them ſafe to the place whither they were going. But they ſeemed to have forgotten the power of their Maſter; and, when human aſſiſtance failed, to have abandoned all hopes of life. The bleſſed Jeſus, therefore, very juſtly rebuked them, "Why are ye fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?" Why ſhould ye doubt of my power to protect you? The voyage was undertaken at my command; and therefore you ſhould have

have been confident that I would not ſuffer you to periſh in it.

It is indeed ſtrange that the diſciples ſhould have been remarkably terrified during the ſtorm, and after it to make this ſingular reflection, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the ſea obey him." *Matt.* viii. 27.

But it ſhould be remembered that the terror of the ſtorm had deprived them of all preſence of mind; ſo that they did not recollect the divine power of their Maſter during the fury of the tempeſt: and the tranſition from a terrible ſtorm to the moſt perfect calm, was ſo quick and aſtoniſhing, that they uttered this reflection before the confuſion in their minds was over.

Soon after the ſtorm was allayed, they arrived in the country of Gadara; and on their landing, two men poſſeſſed with devils came from the tombs to meet Jeſus. One of them, who was more furious than the other, had been often bound with chains and fetters, but to no purpoſe, being always broken with great fury; ſo that no man attempted farther to reſtrain him. Being therefore at liberty, he ſhunned the ſociety of men, wandering day and night in deſert places, among the ſepulchres or caverns where the dead were depoſited, crying and making the moſt diſmal complaints, and cutting himſelf with ſtones.

The diſciples were terrified at the approach of theſe furious mortals; but Jeſus ſoon diſſipated their fears, commanding, while the men were at a diſtance, the devils to come out of them. The heavenly mandate was no ſooner given, than they fell on their faces, crying out, "What have I to do with thee, Jeſus, thou Son of the moſt high God?" *Mark* v. 7. "Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" *Matt.* viii. 29. "I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not." *Mark* v. 7. The apoſtate ſpirits well knew the power of the Son of God, and trembled leſt he ſhould immediately caſt them into the torments prepared for them, and not ſuffer them to continue roving through the earth till the day of judgment, when they ſhould be condemned to eternal puniſhment in the ſight of the whole creation.

Jeſus, being willing that the torments ſuffered by theſe miſerable men ſhould be known before he healed them, aſked one of the devils his name, who anſwered, "Legion, for we are many." *Mark* v. 9. Begging, at the ſame time, that he would not command them to repair into the

deep, or bottomleſs pit, but ſuffer them to enter a herd of ſwine, feeding at a diſtance.

How ſubtle are the wiles of the devil! The power of the Son of God he knew was not to be reſiſted; but he could not help envying the benevolent miracles he had wrought for the ſons of men; and was therefore willing to prevent, as much as poſſible, their good effects on the miſerable people of this country. This was the true reaſon why he begged leave to enter the herd of ſwine: he knew if he could obtain that permiſſion, he could deſtroy them; and this he hoped would render our bleſſed Saviour odious to the wicked inhabitants of Gadara.

Though Jeſus well knew his crafty deſign, yet he permitted the devils to enter the ſwine, that his diſciples and others who were with him might be fully convinced theſe unhappy perſons were really poſſeſſed by apoſtate ſpirits; and at the ſame time give them a terrible inſtance of their power, when free from all reſtraint.

The divine permiſſion was no ſooner granted, than the ſpectators beheld at a diſtance the torments theſe poor creatures ſuffered, with what amazing rapidity they ran to the confines of the lake, leaped from the precipices into the ſea, and periſhed in the waters; while the perſons who, a moment before, were raving and cutting themſelves in the moſt ſhocking manner, became at once meek and compoſed, having recovered entirely the exerciſe of their reaſon.

The keepers of the herd, terrified at this aſtoniſhing miracle, ran into the city, publiſhing in every part, the cure of the men poſſeſſed with the devils, and the deſtruction of the ſwine. This ſurpriſing report threw the inhabitants into the greateſt conſternation: they left the city to be ſpectators of ſo wonderful an event; but when they ſaw the men who had been poſſeſſed, ſitting at the feet of Jeſus, decently cloathed, and in their right minds, their fear was increaſed. For knowing they had treſpaſſed in keeping the ſwine, which was contrary to the law of Moſes, they dreaded a more ſevere puniſhment; and being ignorant of the goodneſs of Jeſus, though he had given them ſo remarkable a proof of it, in the cure of theſe wretched mortals, beſought him that he would leave their country.

There prevailed a cuſtom among the heathens, when any illuſtrious hero had delivered his country from wild beaſts, monſters, tygers, or any other evil, to erect proud columns to

his memory; his ſtatue was ſeen in every place; altars blazed to his glory; they honoured him with the high appellation of Saviour; and thought nothing, not even divine honours, too great to confer upon him. But when Chriſt had removed a monſter from the Gadarenes, more formidable and fearful than any in heathen hiſtory, even a *legion of devils*, and rendered the way by which no man could paſs before, ſecure from danger; inſtead of being received by them as a Saviour, and as the Son of God, with the acclamations and hoſannahs of the people, he was beſought to depart out of their coaſts. Stupid people! They had indeed loſt their herd of ſwine; but ſurely the valuable gift they had received, in two of their countrymen and fellow-creatures, being delivered from the tyranny of Satan, was better than the cattle on a thouſand hills, and merited at leaſt their thanks and acknowledgment!

The ſtupid requeſt of the Gadarenes, was, however, complied with by the bleſſed Jeſus, who entering the ſhip, returned to the country from whence he came, leaving to them a valuable pledge of his love; and to us a noble pattern of perſeverence in well-doing, even when our kindneſſes are condemned, or requited with injuries. He would not ſuffer the perſons diſpoſſeſſed to accompany him, though they earneſtly requeſted it; but ordered them to ſtay in their own country, as a ſtanding monument of his power and goodneſs.—"Go home to thy friends (ſaid the compaſſionate Jeſus to one of them) and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compaſſion on thee." *Mark* v. 19.

We cannot but remark, in this place, that we have here a fuller diſplay of the tyranny and power of the devil, than in any other part of ſcripture: and therefore, we may oppoſe it to the looſe ſcoffs, and recommend it to the ſerious attention of thoſe infidels and thoughtleſs ſinners, who, like the Phariſees and Sadducees of old, when exhorted to abandon their evil courſes, from a conſideration of the power of Satan, and the dread of eternal torments, make a mock at both, eſteeming them nothing more than religious fables calculated to keep the ignorant world in awe.

But with regard to themſelves, their minds are too well furniſhed with wiſdom, and their geniuſes too penetrating, to believe any thing of the flames of the bottomleſs pit, and the

the malice of the prince who ſways the ſceptre of that horrid place; eſteeming him a more mild and generous governor, than he is repreſented in this miracle. But could they be perſuaded to attend ſeriouſly to the miſerable ſpectacle drawn by the Evangeliſt, of a wretched mortal, naked, dwelling in tombs, crying out day and night, cutting himſelf with ſtones, furious, fierce, deſtructive: ſurely their ſcoffs and idle mockeries would be changed into compaſſion, and a watchful care of themſelves. This ſurely common prudence would dictate. But if they will deride, and ſtill diſbelieve; a ſhort ſpace of time, perhaps a ſingle moment, will convince them of their fatal error; and dreadful experience force them to acknowledge the greatneſs of the tyranny, the bitterneſs and malice of this prince of darkneſs, againſt the ſouls of the ſons of men! May that blindneſs of mind, and obduracy of heart, be removed, that ſo they may know and acknowledge the ſalvation of God, thro' Jeſus, who is the way, the truth, and the life!

CHAP. IX.

Our Lord proceeds in Acts of Mercy and Benevolence. Adds Matthew to the Number of his Diſciples. Caſts out an evil Spirit. Paſſes again through Galilee. Selects twelve from among his diſciples, as his conſtant Followers and Companions, and harangues the Multitude in an excellent Diſcourſe.

THE arrival of our Saviour and his diſciples at Capernaum, a city of Galilee, was no ſooner publiſhed, than throngs of people were gathered together, that the houſe could not contain them, nor even the court before the door. He, however, preached the words of eternal life to the liſtening audience, among whom were many Phariſees, and doctors of the law, who from the fame of his miracles, were come from all quarters to hear him.

He not only addreſſed them in the moſt nervous and pathetic manner, in order to inculcate the doctrines he delivered; but alſo performed ſuch aſtoniſhing miracles, as ought to have removed all their ſcruples, with regard to the truth of his miſſion.

Among other inſtances he gave of his divine power, was that of reſtoring a man to perfect health, who had long been afflicted with the palſy, and was reduced by that terrible diſeaſe to the moſt melancholy condition, being unable to move any member of his body, but ſeemed rather an emaciated carcaſe, than a man. This miſerable object was ſupported

ported in his bed, by four perſons, who being unable to enter by the door, on account of the multitude, carried him to the top of the houſe, which, like the other roofs in that country, was flat, and had a battlement round, according to the direction given by Moſes, *Deut.* xxii. 8.

On theſe roofs there was a kind of trap door, by which they came out of the houſes upon the roofs, where they ſpent a conſiderable part of the day. It was alſo common to have a flight of ſtairs from the garden to the roof; and by theſe the perſons ſeemed to have carried the ſick of the palſy; but finding the door faſtened, forced it open, or uncovered the roof, and through the opening let down by ropes the ſick of the palſy, lying on his bed, into the midſt of the company before Jeſus: who ſeeing the faith of the friends of this afflicted perſon, he had compaſſion on him, and ſpake aloud, "Son, be of good cheer, thy ſins are forgiven thee."

The pride of the ſcribes taking offence at this ſaying, cried out, this man ſpeaketh blaſphemy; for he appropriates that to himſelf, which is ſolely the property of Omnipotence. "Who can forgive ſins, but God only?" They were ignorant that the perſon who uttered ſuch gracious words, was the Son of God; and conſequently, had the power of forgiving the ſins of the human race.

But our Lord, who had recourſe to the moſt ſecret receſſes of the heart, and was willing to ſhew them that he was really endued with the Spirit of God, ſaid to them, "Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is it eaſier to ſay to the ſick of the palſy, thy ſins be forgiven thee, or to ſay ariſe, and take up thy bed and walk?" Theſe were queſtions that could only be reſolved of the latter, it being doubtleſs eaſier to forgive ſins, than to remit that which is inflicted as its puniſhment. But theſe incorrigible mortals held their peace; and the bleſſed Jeſus only added, that the miracles he was going to perform, would ſufficiently demonſtrate, that he had not uſurped what did not in the ſtricteſt manner belong to him. And turning himſelf from theſe bigotted teachers of Iſrael, towards the ſick of the palſy, ſaid unto him. "Ariſe, take up thy bed, and go into thine own houſe, *Matt.* ix. 6.

Nor was this divine mandate any ſooner given, than the man was reſtored to his former health and ſtrength; and, to the aſtoniſhment

of all preſent, roſe, took up his bed, and departed to his own houſe, glorifying God. And all the people, when they ſaw this great work, expreſſed the higheſt degree of ſurpriſe mixed with admiration, for the great honour the Almighty had conferred on human nature. "They glorified God who had given ſuch power unto men."

But with regard to the Scribes and Phariſees, though they muſt have been confounded at this miracle, yet they ſtill continued in their unbelief; an inſtance which ſhould awaken in us the moſt ſerious thoughts, as it abundantly demonſtrates that the palſy of the ſoul is a much more deplorable diſeaſe, than the palſy of the body.

The bleſſed Jeſus having wrought this miracle, repaired to the ſea ſide, and taught a multitude of people. What the ſubject of his ſermon was the Evangeliſts have not told us; but it was, doubtleſs, like the reſt, calculated to promote the eternal welfare of mankind.

His diſcourſe being ended, he returned to the city; and in his way ſaw Matthew or Levi the ſon of Alpheus, a rich publican, ſitting in his office, where the cuſtoms are levied at the port of Capernaum, whom he ordered to follow him. Matthew immediately obeyed the ſummons, and followed the Saviour of the world, to purſue a far more honourable and important employment, being afterwards both an Apoſtle and Evangeliſt.

A few days after his converſion, he made a ſplendid entertainment for his Maſter, inviting all the publicans he knew; hoping that by hearing the heavenly converſation of Chriſt, they might alſo repent, and embrace the doctrines of the Goſpel.

The ſelf-righteous Scribes and Phariſees, who conſidered all men as ſinners, except themſelves, eſpecially the publicans, were highly offended that one who called himſelf a prophet, ſo far demeaned himſelf as to be ſeen in the company of ſuch men; and aſked his diſciples, with an air of inſolence, in the hearing of all the gueſts, how their Maſter could ſit down at the ſame table with publicans and ſinners?

Our Lord replied to this artful query, that the ſick only had need of a phyſician, and deſired them to reflect ſeriouſly on the prophet Hoſea's declaration: "I will have mercy and not ſacrifice." The turning ſinners into the paths of righteouſneſs, which is the higheſt act of benevolence,

lence, is far more acceptable to the Almighty, than all the ceremony of the law of Moſes, ſo highly magnified by your fraternity; who, on many occaſions obſerve them, at the expence of charity; adding, "I am not come to call the righteous, but ſinners to repentance." The repentance of the righteous is not ſo much the object of my attention, as the converſion of ſinners.

This anſwer, however ſatisfactory to an unprejudiced perſon, was far from being ſo to the Scribes and Phariſees, who, joining with ſome of John's diſciples, then preſent, returned to Matthew's houſe, and demanded of him why his diſciples wholly neglected to faſt, a duty often performed both by the rulers of Iſrael, and the diſciples of John? To this the bleſſed Jeſus replied, It is not a proper ſeaſon for the friends of the bridegroom to faſt and afflict themſelves, while they enjoy his company: "but the days will come, when the bridegroom ſhall be taken away from them, and then they ſhall faſt." The various calamities and afflictions that ſhall attend them, after the departure of their Maſter, ſhall cauſe them to faſt, which they ſhall repeat as often as the circumſtances of diſtreſs and danger, with which they are ſurrounded, ſhall require it. And added, that to have obliged his diſciples to have obſerved the precepts of frequent abſtinence, at a time when he was employing them to preach the Goſpel, by which all the legal ceremonies of the law were to be aboliſhed, would have been as abſurd, as to ſew a piece of new cloth upon a rotten garment, which would only make the rent worſe; or to put new wine into old leathern bottles, which on the firſt fermentation of the liquor, would burſt. Indicating that the old corrupt nature of man, will not admit of a thorough reformation being made, at once; that infant-virtue muſt not immediately be put to the greateſt trials, leſt it be deſtroyed by the ſeverity of the exerciſe.

During this controverſy between our Lord and the haughty Scribes and Phariſees, in Matthew's houſe, Jairus, a ruler of the ſynagogue, came running to him, in all the agonies of grief; and, in the preſence of the whole company, fell on the ground before him, beſeeching him that he would come and heal his daughter, who lay at the point of death.

When did the beneficent Jeſus deny his gracious aſſiſtance to thoſe who implored it of him? He immediately aroſe, and followed the ruler

ruler towards his houſe, ſurrounded by a great multitude of people, who were deſirous of ſeeing ſo great a miracle performed.

But as he paſſed through the ſtreets, a woman who had for twelve years been afflicted with an iſſue, or flux of the blood, and had ſpent her whole ſubſtance on phyſicians, to no purpoſe, "came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment: for ſhe ſaid within herſelf, if I may but touch his clothes, I ſhall be whole." Nor was ſhe deceived; for no ſooner had ſhe touched the border of the garment of the Son of God, than her iſſue of blood dried up; and ſhe felt by the return of her health and ſtrength, and other agreeable ſenſations, that accompany ſuch ſudden changes, from painful diſeaſes to perfect health, that the cure was abſolutely complete.

But this tranſaction could not be concealed: the bleſſed Jeſus knew the whole, and her ſecret thoughts, before ſhe put them in practice, and pleaſed with the opinion this woman had entertained both of his power and goodneſs, would not by any means ſuffer it to paſs unapplauded. Accordingly, he turned himſelf about in the preſs, and ſaid "Who touched me?" He well knew the perſon: but aſked this queſtion for the fuller manifeſtation of the woman's faith, and that he might have an opportunity of inſtructing and comforting her.

His diſciples being ignorant of what had paſſed, were ſurpriſed at the queſtion, "Thou ſeeſt (ſaid they to their Maſter) the multitude thronging and preſſing thee, and ſayeſt thou, who touched me?" They did not diſtinguiſh between the ſpiritual and corporeal touch, nor knew that ſuch efficacious virtue had gone out of their Maſter. Jeſus, however, perſiſted in knowing who it was that had done the thing; and the woman finding it in vain to conceal her action any longer, came to him, trembling, and told him all. Perhaps the uncleanneſs of her diſtemper, was the reaſon of her fear, thinking he would be offended, even at her touching the hem of his garment. But the divine Phyſician, far from being angry, ſpake to her in the kindeſt manner, and commended her faith, on which account he had conſented to heal her plague. "Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole." *Matt.* ix. 22.

Such a miraculous incident, muſt doubtleſs have ſtrengthened the ruler's faith; for behold a virtue, little inferior

inferior to that of raiſing the dead, iſſues from the border of his garment, and heals a diſeaſe, which, for the ſpace of twelve years, had baffled all the ingenuity of the healing art, and defied the power of medicine. Indeed the faith of this ruler had great need of the ſtrongeſt confirmations; for news was brought him that his daughter was even now dead; and therefore it was needleſs for him to give any further trouble to Jeſus, not in the leaſt ſuſpecting that he had power to recal the fleeting ſpirit, and re-animate a breathleſs carcaſe.

This meſſage was a terrible blow to the affectionate parent. His only daughter, who, a few days before, was in the bloom of youth, was now a pale and lifeleſs corpſe: and with her all his joys and comforts were fled. But Jeſus, commiſerating his grief, deſired him to be comforted, promiſing that his daughter ſhould be made whole.

On his coming to the ruler's houſe, he found it full of mourners, who made terrible lamentations; a ſufficient demonſtration that the damſel was really dead. And, accordingly, when our bleſſed Saviour deſired the mourners to ceaſe their funeral ceremonies, as "the maid was not dead, but ſleeping, they laughed him to ſcorn."

It is neceſſary to remark, in this place, that the Jews, when they ſpeak of a perſon's death, ſtile it *ſleep*, to intimate their belief that his ſpirit exiſteth in the happy ſcenes of paradiſe, and their hopes of a future reſurrection to life eternal. But the bleſſed Jeſus uſed the word with remarkable propriety, to ſignify, that though ſhe was now locked in the cold embraces of death, yet he was going to releaſe her from the power of the king of terrors, with the ſame eaſe as a perſon is awaked from ſleep. Thus our bleſſed Saviour, in the very manner of performing the miracle, modeſtly declined the honour that would undoubtedly reſult from a work ſo greatly ſuperior to all the power of the ſons of men.

Having thus briefly addreſſed the mourners, he entered the chamber where the damſel was lying, but ſuffered none to follow him, except Peter, James, and John; together with the father and mother of the damſel. Probably his reaſon for ſuffering theſe only to be ſpectators of ſo ſtupendous a miracle, was that they might have an opportunity of examining the whole tranſaction in the moſt careful manner, and be thence enabled, afterwards, to report it upon the fulleſt conviction, and with every circumſtance of credibility.

The bleſſed Jeſus now approached the body, took her by the hand, and with a gentle voice, ſaid, "Maid, ariſe." The heavenly command was inſtantly obeyed; the damſel aroſe, as from a ſleep, and with all the appearance of health and vigour; for Jeſus commanded to give her ſomething to eat: a plain proof that ſhe did not appear in the weak and languiſhing condition of a perſon worn out with diſeaſe, or even like one who had fainted away; a circumſtance that abundantly proves the greatneſs and perfection of the miracle. It is therefore no wonder that her parents ſhould be aſtoniſhed at ſo ſtupendous a work, the fame of which was preſently ſpread thro' all the neighbouring country; though Jeſus, who was in every ſenſe above praiſe, and therefore never courted it, had ſtrictly charged them that they ſhould tell no man what was done.

Theſe inſtances of power did the bleſſed Jeſus diſplay, to convince the world that thoſe who die in him, are not dead; and that he hath the keys of life and death. Thoſe alſo of the preſent age, who believe that the ſoul ſleeps with the body, till the reſurrection, would do well to conſider the expreſſion of the Evangeliſt, "her ſpirit came again," *Luke* viii. 55. which ſufficiently ſhews that the ſoul exiſts ſeparately, when the body is laid in the chambers of the grave.

Having performed this benevolent miracle, our bleſſed Saviour left the ruler's houſe, and was followed thro' the ſtreets by two blind men, imploring aſſiſtance; nor did they implore in vain. The Redeemer of mankind was always ready to grant the petions of thoſe who made application to him for relief. Accordingly, he was no ſooner entered into the houſe, to avoid the thronging of the multitude, than he touched their eyes, and ſaid, "According to your faith, be it unto you," *Matt.* ix. 29. And immediately the valuable gift of ſight was beſtowed upon them.

The blind men were ſo overjoyed at beholding the light, that though he charged them to keep the miracle a ſecret, they publiſhed his fame in every part of the country, being unwilling to conceal what, in gratitude for ſo great a mercy, they thought themſelves obliged to divulge.

The men who had thus miraculouſly received their ſight, being departed, the multitude brought unto him a "dumb man, poſſeſſed with a devil." So moving a ſight could not

not fail of attracting a compassionate regard from the Saviour of the world, who being never weary of well doing, immediately cast out the apostate spirit; on which the dumb man recovered the use of his speech, and spake in a very rational manner to the multitude, who, with one voice declared, that such wondrous works were never wrought by any of the old prophets, "It was never seen so in Israel." *Matt.* ix. 33.

These works did not remove the prejudice of the Pharisees, who being unable to deny the miracle, insinuated that he did it by a power received from Beelzebub, "the prince of the devils." A poor pretence indeed! and did not escape the animadversion it deserved from the Saviour of the world, as we shall see in a succeeding chapter. Well might the prophet Isaiah cry out in a prophetic extasy, "Who hath believed our report; and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"

But all their calumnies could not provoke the meek and merciful Jesus, to cease from performing these compassionate offices for the children of men. On the contrary, he exerted himself still more and more, to promote the prosperity and salvation of the whole human race. And accordingly he left Capernaum, and travelled through the country in search of miserable objects, on whom he might confer happiness and peace; visiting "all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness, and every disease among the people." *Matt.* ix. 55.

In his return from this tour to Capernaum, he was attended by a great number of people, who expressed a more than common desire to hear the doctrines of the gospel. An incident abundantly sufficient to engage the attention of this divine teacher, who was always careful to cultivate the latent seeds of virtue, and cherish the least appearance of piety and religion.

It was not this desire of the people alone that excited his compassion towards them: he well knew they were wholly destitute of spiritual teachers; for the Scribes and Pharisees, who ought to have instructed them, were blind, perverse, and lazy guides, who instead of seeking the glory of the Almighty, made it their whole business to support and augment their own. They magnified the ritual ceremonies and traditions; but took no care to inspire the people with a love for virtue. "To do justice, love mercy, and

and walk humbly with their God," were no parts of their doctrine. The ſmall appearance of religion they entertained, was wholly hypocritical; and the diſputes carried on with ſo much bitterneſs between the factions of the Phariſees and Sadducees, diſtracted the minds of the people.

The inhabitants of Judea were truly in a deplorable ſituation, which called loudly for the compaſſion of the Son of God, who always regarded the deſcendants of Jacob, with the moſt tender affection. He ſaw the ſheep of Iſrael ſcattered on the barren waſtes of error and ſuperſtition, without a a ſhepherd to lead them to the heavenly paſtures of the law and the prophets. He ſaw; he commiſerated their diſtreſs; and he reſolved to provide ſome remedy for it. Accordingly he directed his apoſtles to interceed with the Almighty, who by his ſervant the prophets had ſown the ſeeds of piety and virtue in the minds of the Jews, that he would not ſuffer the rich harveſt to be loſt, for want of labourers; "the harveſt (ſaid the bleſſed Jeſus, to his diſciples) truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few, Pray ye, therefore, the lord of the harveſt, that he will ſend forth labourers into his harveſt." *Matt.* ix. 37, 38.

To theſe gracious acts, he added the moſt powerful of all interceſſions to the throne of grace, his own prevailing prayer. And accordingly aſcended to the top of the mountain, and there ſpent the night in making the moſt powerful petitions in behalf of "the loſt ſheep of Iſrael," to his heavenly Father.

Having ſpent the night in this pious exerciſe, he loſt no time in putting his beneficent intentions in execution; for no ſooner had darkneſs withdrawn her ſable veil, and the bluſhing rays of the morning adorned the chambers of the eaſt, than this benevolent Redeemer of mankind called his diſciples unto him, and choſe twelve, whom he named Apoſtles, to be always with him; and that he might ſend them forth to preach. He ordered them to be conſtantly with him, that they might learn from his own mouth the doctrines they were to preach to the whole world; that they might *ſee his glory*, the tranſcendent glory of the virtues which adorned his human life; and that they might be witneſſes of all the wonderous works he ſhould perform, during his reſidence on the earth, and by which his miſſion from the courts of heaven was to be fully demonſtrated.

Theſe

These twelve persons, thus qualified, were to supply the people with that spiritual food they so greatly wanted, both while their Master continued here below, and after his ascension to the right hand of power.

Having ordained them to their respective offices, he sent them out by two and two, into the most distant parts of Judea, to preach there the glad tidings of the gospel, and prepare the way for their Master, the great Shepherd of Israel.

And that nothing might be wanting to render their preaching acceptable to the people, and confirm the important doctrines they delivered, he invested them with full power to cure all diseases, cast out devils, and even to raise the dead.

Perhaps the number of the twelve apostles was fixed upon, rather than any other, to shew that God intended, by their ministry, to gather together the scattered remnant of the twelve tribes of Israel. But be that as it may, these twelve apostles constantly continued with Jesus, from the time of their election, till he offered himself a sacrifice on the cross for the sins of mankind, never departing from him, unless by his own appointment.

All these persons being illiterate Galileans, and at first destitute of all the qualifications necessary in the discharge of their duty, integrity alone excepted, were the most unlikely persons in the world to confound the wisdom of the wise, baffle the power of the mighty, overturn the many false religions, which then flourished every where under the protection of the civil government; and in short, to reform the manners of mankind, then universally corrupted.

Had the choice of instruments for so grand an undertaking, been committed to human prudence, such doubtless would have been chosen, as were remarkable for learning, strong reasoning and prevailing eloquence. But behold the wisdom of God, infinitely superior to that of man, acted very differently; for the treasure of the gospel was committed to earthen vessels, that the excellency of its power might in all countries appear to be of God.

Accordingly, the religion which these illiterate Galileans taught thro' the world, exhibited a far juster notion of things, than the Grecian and Roman philosophers were able to attain, though their lives were spent in study and contemplation. Hence by its own intrinsic splendor, as well as by the external glory of the miracles

that accompanied it, this religion ſufficiently appeared to be wholly original, and divine.

Beſides, its truth and dignity was ſufficiently atteſted, by the remarkable ſucceſs that attended it. It was received every where, by the bulk of the people, with the higheſt applauſe, as ſomething they had been hitherto ſeeking in vain; while the maxims and precepts of the philoſophers never ſpread farther than their reſpective ſchools.

It was therefore with the higheſt wiſdom that the foundations of the church were laid in the labours of a few illiterate fiſhermen; for it demonſtrated, with irreſiſtable evidence, that the immenſe fabric was at firſt raiſed, and is ſtill ſuſtained, not by the arm of man, but the hand of the Governor of the Univerſe.

After appointing the twelve apoſtles, he came down from the mountain, and was joyfully received by multitudes of people, who were waiting for him in the plain, and preſſed to touch him; well knowing that if they could only touch the border of his garment, they ſhould be healed of whatever diſtemper they were afflicted with. A ſufficient reaſon why they were continually waiting for him, and were willing to accompany him, even into the remoteſt corners of the wilderneſs.

The preaching and miracles of our Lord were not attended to by the low and vulgar only; perſons of the firſt rank and character came from diſtant parts of the country, to converſe with him, hear his doctrine, and be ſpectators of his wonderful works. It therefore evidently appears, that perſons of all ranks were deſirous of following him; and their deſire could be founded on nothing but the truth of his miracles.

After healing all the ſick among the multitude, he turned towards his diſciples, and delivered a divine diſcourſe, ſomething like that he had before preached to them on the mountain; but in the former, he only pronounced bleſſings, whereas in the latter, he added curſes, alſo; and in this principally it differs from that recorded by St. Matthew: I ſhall therefore only ſelect a few paſſages from the ſermon now delivered, as I have given a large paraphraſe on the former.

"Wo unto you that are rich, for you have received your conſolation," *Luke* vi. 24. Riches, conſidered in themſelves, have no tendency to render us the objects of the Almighty's hatred, unleſs accompanied with thoſe vices,

vices, which too often flow from an opulent fortune; as luxury, covetouſneſs, and the like. The wo, therefore, is here denounced againſt ſuch only, as are contaminated with theſe vices; for thoſe who make a proper uſe of their wealth, and poſſeſs the virtues which ſhould accompany affluence, have no ſhare in the malediction.

"Wo unto you that are full, for ye ſhall hunger." The pain ye ſhall ſuffer, in a future life, ſhall be ſharp and excruciating. The opportunities you neglected of doing good to your afflicted brethren, in this life, ſhall then be remembered with the moſt poignant grief, and bewailed with the moſt bitter lamentations.

"Wo unto you that laugh now, for ye ſhall mourn and weep." This malediction of our bleſſed Saviour is not inconſiſtent with the apoſtle's precepts, which command people alway to rejoice. Neither is the mirth, againſt which the wo is here denounced, to be underſtood of that conſtant chearfulneſs of temper, which ariſes in the breaſt of true Chriſtians, from the comfortable and chearful doctrine with which they are enlightened by the Goſpel, the aſſurance they have of reconciliation with God, the hope they have of everlaſting life, and the pleaſure they enjoy in the practice of virtue, and the other duties of religion; but it relates to that turbulent, carnal mirth; that exceſſive levity and vanity of ſpirit, which ariſes not from any ſolid foundation, but from immoderate ſenſual pleaſures, or thoſe vain amuſements of life, in which the giddy and the gay contrive to ſpend their time; that ſort of mirth which diſſipates thought, leaves no time for conſideration, and gives them an utter averſion to all ſerious reflection. Perſons who conſtantly indulge themſelves in this kind of mirth, ſhall weep and mourn, eternally, when they are excluded from the joys of heaven, and baniſhed for ever from the preſence of God, by the light of whoſe countenance all the righteous are enlivened, and made tranſcendently happy.

"Wo unto you when all men ſhall ſpeak well of you, for ſo did their fathers to the falſe prophets." Wo unto you, if by propagating ſuch doctrines as encourage men in ſin, you ſhall gain to yourſelves the applauſe and flattery of the generality of men; for thus in old times did the falſe prophets and deceivers, who, accommodating their doctrines to the luſts and paſſions of men, gained their applauſe, but incurred the wrath of an all-ſeeing, juſt God.

CHAP.

CHAP. X.

Continuation of our Lord's glorious Doctrines, beneficent Acts, and aſtoniſhing Miracles, wrought in Confirmation of his Divine Miſſion, and the extending of his heavenly Kingdom.

THE divine Preacher, having cloſed this excellent ſermon, he repaired to Capernaum, and was met by certain meſſengers from a Centurion, deſiring him to come and heal a ſervant, who was dear to him, and ready to die.

This Centurion, from the account given of him by the Evangeliſt, ſeems to have been a proſelyte to the Jewiſh religion, as he was a lover of the ſons of Jacob, and had erected for them a place of worſhip; and accordingly the inhabitants of Capernaum ſtrongly eſpouſed his cauſe, on this occaſion, ſaying, "that he was worthy for whom he ſhould do this. For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a ſynagogue." *Luke* vii. 4, 5.

There was not the leaſt danger that this petition would be rejected by the bleſſed Jeſus, who ſought all occaſions of doing good to the children of men. Accordingly, he very readily accompanied the meſſengers; but before he came to the houſe, he was met by ſome of the Centurion's friends, who expreſſed the high idea that officer entertained of his power, and deſired that he would not take the trouble of coming to his houſe, as his word was abundantly ſufficient to perform the cure. At this meſſage, Jeſus turned himſelf about, and ſaid to the multitude, "I ſay unto you, I have not found ſo great faith, no not in Iſrael." *Luke* vii. 9.

The perſons having delivered their meſſage, returned to the houſe, and found the ſervant who had been ſick, perfectly recovered.

Many perſons have thought that this miracle, and that mentioned in Matt. vii. are the ſame; but this is a miſtake. The Centurion, in the former, came in perſon, but in the latter, the petition was ſent by the elders of Capernaum. There is not the leaſt hint, in the firſt miracle, that the Centurion was a proſelyte; but he, in the ſecond, is ſaid to have been a lover of the Jewiſh nation, and to have built them a ſynagogue. Several other particulars, which prove theſe miracles to have been really different, will eaſily occur to the reader, and therefore we ſhall not here enumerate them; what has been ſaid will, we preſume, be ſufficient to remove any objection that may be offered againſt our conſidering them as different tranſactions.

Having

Having thus miraculouſly healed the Centurion's ſervant, he repaired to Peter's houſe to eat bread: but the multitude came again together, and ſurrounded the houſe in a very tumultuous manner, demanding, in all probability, that he would heal their ſick: and it was not without difficulty they were diſperſed by his friends.

The multitude being diſperſed, Jeſus called unto him the twelve apoſtles he had before choſen, and conferred on them the power of working miracles, in confirmation of the doctrines they were appointed to preach, and delivered them ſuch inſtructions as he thought neceſſary to enable them to diſcharge the duties of this important commiſſion.

"Go (ſaid their heavenly Maſter) and preach, ſaying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Publiſh in every corner of Judea, the glad tidings of the Goſpel, and the near approach of the great Meſſiah's kingdom; not a temporal, but a ſpiritual empire, conſiſting of righteouſneſs and peace.

To inure them to thoſe hardſhips and dangers, which were to attend them in their preaching, after the death of their Maſter, our Lord forbade them to provide any thing for their journey; teaching them to rely wholly on the providence of God, for ſupport, in every diſtreſs, and to have recourſe to his protection, in every danger.

Our Lord's diſciples had, perhaps, flattered themſelves with the pleaſing expectation, that the glad tidings they were going to publiſh, and the miraculous cures they were enabled to perform, would procure them an honourable reception, wherever they came. Their Maſter, however, told them the event would not in any manner anſwer their expectations; but that they were every where to be deſpiſed, perſecuted, delivered into the hands of the rulers, and puniſhed as wicked men. But at the ſame time, he promiſed them the aid of the Almighty, and gave them inſtructions for their behaviour, in every particular. He added, that thoſe who rejected their meſſage, ſhould be treated with ſeverity, by the great Judge of all the earth; but thoſe who received them kindly, and gave even a cup of cold water to the leaſt of his diſciples, for their Maſter's ſake, ſhould not fail of receiving a large reward.

Having received this commiſſion, the apoſtles viſited all parts of Paleſtine, where the Jews inhabited, preaching the Goſpel and the doctrine

of repentance, working miracles for its confirmation, and particularly healing the ſick, while our bleſſed Saviour continued the courſe of his miniſtry in Galilee.

The apoſtles being returned from the tour, Jeſus went to Nain, a town ſituated near Endor, about two miles ſouth of Mount Tabour, attended by many of his diſciples, and a great multitude of people.

On their coming to the entrance of the city, a melancholy ſcene preſented itſelf to the eyes of Jeſus and his followers. "Behold there was a dead man carried out, the only ſon of his mother, and ſhe was a widow." *Luke* vi. 12. Who would not have imagined, that God had indeed "forgotten to be gracious, and in his anger ſhut up his tender mercies" from this poor widow, ſuffering under the heavieſt load, and labouring under the moſt oppreſſive burden of diſtreſs? Deprived of her ſon, in the flower of his youth, when he might have repaid his mother's toils, and been to her in the place of a huſband; of that huſband ſhe had long ſince loſt, and whoſe loſs was ſupportable only thro' the comfort of this child, the ſurviving image of his departed father, the balm of all her grief, the hope of her afflicted ſoul: Who now ſhall adminiſter conſolation, to this ſolitary widow, to this lonely parent, bereaved of her huſband, deprived of her child? what miſery can be more complicated? what can be more natural, than that ſhe ſhould refuſe to be comforted, that ſhe ſhould go down to the grave with mourning, and viſit the chambers of death, the reſidence of the beloved remains of her huſband, and her ſon, with ſorrow.

Towards the receptacle of mortality, that dreary waſte of forgetfulneſs, the mournful funeral was now with ſlow and ſolemn pomp advancing, when the compaſſionate Redeemer of Mankind met the melancholy proceſſion, compoſed of a long train of her weeping neighbours and relations, who pitied her diſtreſs, ſympathized with her in this great affliction, and were melted with compaſſion at her deplorable circumſtances; but ſighs and tears were all they had to offer, relief could not be expected from a human being; their commiſeration, though grateful to her oppreſſed ſoul, could neither reſtore her huſband, nor the ſon; ſubmiſſion and patience were the only leſſons they could preach, or this afflicted daughter of Iſrael learn.

But though man was unable to relieve

lieve the diſtreſſes of this diſconſolate widow, the Saviour of the world, who beheld the melancholy proceſſion, was both able and willing to do it. There was no need of a powerful ſolicitor to implore aſſiſtance of the Son of God, his own compaſſion was abundantly ſufficient; "When the Lord ſaw her, he had compaſſion on her." He both ſought the patient, and offered the cure, unexpectedly. "Weep not," ſaid the kind Reliever of miſery, to this afflicted woman. Alas! it had been wholly in vain to bid her refrain from tears, who had loſt her only child, the ſole comfort of her age, without adminiſtering the balm of comfort to heal her broken ſpirit. This our benevolent Redeemer well knew; and therefore, immediately advancing towards the corps, "he touched the bier." The pomp of the funeral was inſtantly ſtopped, ſilence cloſed every mouth, and expectation filled the breaſt of every ſpectator. But this deep ſuſpence did not long continue. That glorious voice which ſhall one day call our dead bodies from the grave, filled their ears with this remarkable words, "Young man, I ſay unto thee, ariſe." Nor was this powerful command uttered without its conſtant effect. "He ſpake, and it was done." He called with authority, and immediately, "he that was dead, ſat up, and began to ſpeak; and he reſtored him to his mother." He did not ſhew him around to the multitude; but by a ſingular act of modeſty and humanity, delivered him to his late afflicted, now aſtoniſhed and rejoicing mother, to intimate, that in compaſſion to her great diſtreſs, he had wrought this ſtupendous miracle.

A holy and an awful fear fell on all who heard and ſaw this aſtoniſhing event: "and they glorified God, ſaying, that a great prophet is riſen up among us; and that God had viſited his people."

Here it muſt be obſerved, that as this miracle is liable to no objection; it therefore abundantly proves, that the power of the bleſſed Jeſus was truly and abſolutely divine. He met this funeral proceſſion by accident. It was compoſed of the greateſt part of the inhabitants of the city, who bewailed the diſconſolate ſtate of the afflicted widow, and therefore well knew that the youth was really dead. The powerful word which called the breathleſs body to life, was delivered in an audible voice, before all the company, and even at the very gate of the city, the place of public reſort

ſort. This miracle, with others amply atteſted, abundantly evince the truth of our Saviour's miſſion, and that he was indeed the Son of God, the Redeemer of mankind.

CHAP. XI.

The Character of John the Baptiſt cleared and juſtified, by the bleſſed Jeſus. Diſplay of our Lord's Humility and Condeſcenſion, by conforming to the Cuſtom of the Age and Place, where he lived.

WE have taken notice, in a foregoing chapter, that Herod incenſed at the honeſt freedom of the Baptiſt, reproving his adulterous commerce with Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, had caſt him into priſon; and in this ſtate he ſtill continued, though his diſciples were ſuffered to viſit and converſe with him. In one of theſe viſits they had given him an account of our Saviour's having elected twelve apoſtles to preach the goſpel, and of his miracles, particularly of his raiſing to life the daughter of Jarius, and the ſon of the widow of Nain.

On hearing theſe wonderful relations the Baptiſt immediately diſpatched two of his diſciples to Jeſus, to aſk him this important queſtion; "Art thou he that ſhould come, or look we for another?"

Accordingly, the diſciples of John came to Jeſus; and propoſed the queſtion of their maſter, at the very time when he cured many of their infirmities, and plagues, and of evil ſpirits, and to many that were blind he gave ſight.

Jeſus therefore, inſtead of directly anſwering their queſtion, bid them return, and inform their maſter what they had ſeen; "Go your way, and tell John what things ye have ſeen and heard; how that the blind ſee, the lame walk, the leapers are cleanſed, the deaf hear, the dead are raiſed, to the poor the goſpel is preached. *Matt.* ix. 4, 5. Go tell your maſter, that the very miracles the prophet Iſaiah ſo long ſince foretold ſhould be wrought by the Meſſiah, you have yourſelves ſeen performed.

It appears from ſcripture, that the Baptiſt, through the whole courſe of his miniſtry, had borne conſtant and ample teſtimony to our Saviour's divine miſſion: that he exhorted thoſe who came to him, to reſt their faith, not on himſelf, but on him that ſhould come after him; and that as ſoon as he was acquainted who Jeſus was, by a viſible deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt, and a voice from heaven, he made it his buſineſs to diſpoſe the Jews in general, and his own diſciples in particular, to receive and reverence

verence him, by teſtifying every where, that he was the "Son of God, the Lamb of God, who came down from heaven, and ſpake the words of God, and to whom God had given the ſpirit, without meaſure."

The Baptiſt therefore well knew who Jeſus was; and conſequently, he did not ſend his diſciples to aſk this queſtion to ſolve any doubt in his mind concerning the Saviour of the world.

But it will be demanded, what elſe could induce the Baptiſt to aſk ſuch a queſtion? To this ſome anſwer, that he had no other intention than to ſatisfy his diſciples that Jeſus was the Meſſiah, ſo long expected among the Jews; and to engage them to follow a more perfect Maſter, eſpecially as he himſelf was now on the point of leaving the world.

This ſolution is doubtleſs partly right, but it does not ſeem to remove the whole difficulty, as it is plain, from the very account recorded by the Evangeliſt, that the queſtion had actually ſome relation to himſelf; and therefore we muſt remove the difficulty, by ſome other method. In order to which, it muſt be remembered, that John had been long confined in priſon; and being perſuaded that it was neceſſary for him to preach the Goſpel, and prepare men to receive the kingdom of the Meſſiah; and for that reaſon, from the very time of his impriſonment, earneſtly expected that the Meſſiah would exert his power to procure his releaſe. But on hearing that Jeſus had choſen twelve illiterate fiſhermen to preach the Goſpel, and furniſhed them with miraculous powers, in order to enable them to perform ſo great a work; and that two perſons of no conſequence were raiſed from the dead, while he was ſuffered to remain in priſon, he began to think himſelf neglected, and his ſervices diſregarded. He therefore ſent two of his diſciples to aſk him this queſtion. "Art thou he that ſhould come; or, look we for another?" Not that he entertained any doubt of his being the true Meſſiah, intending nothing more, by making the demand, but to complain that Jeſus had not acted the part which he thought the Meſſiah ſhould have acted: and that this was really the caſe, ſeems ſufficiently plain, from the caution added by our Saviour himſelf. "And bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me." As if he had ſaid, when you have informed your maſter of what you have ſeen and heard, tell him that he would do well not to be of-

fended, either at the choice of the Apoſtles, or that no miracle has been wrought for his releaſe.

From this circumſtance, it is evident, that impatience on account of his long confinement, was the true reaſon for the Baptiſt's ſending his diſciples with this queſtion to Jeſus; and that the purport of the anſwer was, to teach him ſubmiſſion, in a caſe that was plainly above the reach of his judgment.

Leſt the people, from this converſation, ſhould imbibe any opinion prejudicial to the character of the Baptiſt, our bleſſed Lord thought proper to place it in a proper point of light. He praiſed his invincible courage and conſtancy, which was not to be overcome, or "like a reed to be ſhaken by the wind:" his auſtere and mortified life: for he was not "cloathed in ſoft raiment," like thoſe who wait in the palaces of kings; adding, that he was a "prophet, nay, more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written, Behold I ſend my meſſenger before thy face, which ſhall prepare thy way before thee." But ſubjoined, "notwithſtanding, he that is leaſt in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than he."

The propriety of this remark, will appear, when it is conſidered, that though the Baptiſt excelled all the prophets that were before him, yet the leaſt inſpired perſon in the kingdom of heaven, the leaſt apoſtle or preacher of the Goſpel, was greater than he; becauſe, by conſtantly attending on Jeſus, they were much better acquainted with his character, diſpoſition, and doctrine, than the Baptiſt, who had only ſeen him tranſiently; wherefore, in reſpect of their perſonal knowledge of the Meſſiah, the apoſtles greatly excelled the Baptiſt. They were alſo employed not in making preparation for the Meſſiah's kingdom, but in erecting it; and conſequently greater than the Baptiſt, with reſpect to the dignity of their office. Moreover, by having the gift of miracles, and the like, conferred on them for that office, they were far ſuperior to him, with regard to illumination. They were ſo fully poſſeſſed by the ſpirit, that on all occaſions they could declare the will of God, infallibly, being, as it were, living oracles; and having been the ſubjects of ancient prophecies, they had been long expected by the people of God.

Having thus ſhewn the greatneſs of the Baptiſt's character, and wherein he was ſurpaſſed by the diſciples, our bleſſed

bleſſed Saviour took occaſion from thence, to blame the perverſeneſs of the age, in rejecting both his own, and the Baptiſt's teſtimony.

It ſeems that the Scribes and Phariſees, ſeeing their pretended mortifications eclipſed by the real auſterity of the Baptiſt, impudently affirmed that his living in the deſarts, his ſhunning the company of men, the coarſeneſs of his cloathing, the abſtemiouſneſs of his diet, and the other ſeverities he practiſed, were the effects of his being poſſeſſed by an apoſtate ſpirit, or of a religious melancholy. "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and ye ſay he hath a devil." *Matt.* xi. 18.

On the other hand, they would not liſten to the heavenly doctrines preached by Chriſt, becauſe he did not ſeparate himſelf from ſociety; attributing his free manner of living to a certain looſeneſs of diſpoſition, though they well knew that he obſerved the ſtricteſt temperance himſelf, and never encouraged the vice of others, either by diſſimulation or example. "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they ſay, Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and ſinners; but wiſdom is juſtified of her children." *Matt.* xi. 19.

He next proceeded to upbraid the ſeveral cities where his moſt wonderful works had been performed. For though they had heard him preach many awakening ſermons, and ſeen him perform numerous aſtoniſhing miracles, ſuch as would have converted Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom, cities infamous for their impiety, contempt of religion, pride, luxury, and debauchery; yet ſo great was their obſtinacy, that they perſiſted in their wickedneſs, notwithſtanding all he had done to convert them from the evil of their ways. "Wo unto thee, Chorazin, wo unto thee, Bethſaida; for if the mighty works that have been done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented, long ago, in ſackcloth and aſhes. But I ſay unto you, it ſhall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, in the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, that art exalted unto heaven, ſhalt be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works that have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I ſay unto you, that it ſhall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for thee." *Matt.* xi. 21, &c.

Having denounced theſe judgments

ments on the cities which had neglected to profit by his mighty works, he concluded his diſcourſe, with theſe heavenly words; "Come to me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you reſt. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye ſhall find reſt to your ſouls. For my yoke is eaſy and my burden is light." *Matt.* xi. 22, &c.

This affecting invitation muſt engage the moſt ſerious attention and particular regard of every reader; if the greatneſs of the ſpeaker, the importance of his meſſage, or the affectionate manner of his addreſs, have any weight, have any force, have any power to affect the ſoul. It is Chriſt, the Redeemer of mankind, the Son of the Moſt High; he into whoſe hands, as our Mediator, all things are delivered of his Father; he unto whom all power in heaven and earth is given; even he who ſhall come in the clouds of heaven, to judge all the inhabitants of the earth, and even by thoſe words he hath himſelf delivered. It is this highly exalted perſon that ſpeaks, declaring at once his great willingneſs to receive them, and his power to give that reſt and peace to the ſoul, which is the purſuit of every ſon of Adam, and is the gift of his Religion only. Nor is the invitation leſs important, containing the whole glad tidings of the Goſpel to every oppreſſed and ſinful ſoul. And that nothing may prevent our accepting this benevolent offer, he invites, with the moſt affectionate tenderneſs, not the great, the happy, and the powerful, nor the merry-hearted, and the ſons of joy, but "all that labour, and are heavy laden;" all that are under the bondage of ſin and ſorrow, and thoſe he calls, not with a deſire to expoſe their miſeries, to puniſh their offences, or to diſplay his own glory, but ſolely, with a view to render them happy. "Come (ſays he) come to me, I entreat you to come, I will give you reſt." I myſelf will relieve and releaſe you from your heavy burdens; come to me, and you ſhall find perfect reſt and peace to your ſouls. "Take my yoke upon you, for it is eaſy, and my burden, for it is light."

Is it poſſible that creatures of a day like us; can it be poſſible that "mortals who have but a ſhort time to live, and are full of miſery, who come up and are cut down like a flower, who flee as it were a ſhadow and never continue in one ſtay;" can it be poſſible that they ſhould reject and diſregard a call ſo full of love,

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ſo full of affection, of ſuch infinite conſequence, of ſuch unſpeakable advantage? Can they reject the love of him who gave them reſt, took their burdens upon himſelf; and who, after all his ſufferings, deſires them only to *come*, to exchange their own oppreſſive burdens, for his lightſome yoke; to abandon their ſins and ſorrows, and become his diſciples; to love and obey him, and thence to be happy? Can we poſſibly deſpiſe ſuch grace, refuſe ſuch offers, fly from ſuch reſt, thus freely propoſed to us, and prefer the heavy yoke of ſin, and the cruel pangs of a wounded conſcience?

Having concluded this public addreſs, one of the Phariſees deſired he would eat with him. The bleſſed Jeſus accepted the invitation, accompanied him to his houſe, and ſat down to meat. He had not continued long at the table, before a woman, who had lately left the paths of vice for thoſe of virtue, placed herſelf behind him, and from a deep conviction of the former crimes, and the obligation ſhe owed the Saviour of mankind, for bringing her to a ſenſe of them, ſhed ſuch quantities of tears, that they trickled down on his feet, which, according to the cuſtom of the country, was then bare. But obſerving that her tears had wet the feet of her beloved inſtructor, ſhe immediately wiped them with the hair of her head, kiſſed them with the moſt ardent affection, and anointed them with precious ointment ſhe had brought with her for that purpoſe.

It was a cuſtom, among the inhabitants of the eaſt, to pour fragrant oils on the heads of ſuch gueſts as they intended particularly to honour, while they ſat at meat, and probably the woman's original intention was to anoint Jeſus in the uſual manner. But being exceedingly humbled, on account of her former crimes, ſhe could not preſume to take that freedom with him, and therefore poured it on his feet, to expreſs at once the greatneſs of her love, and the profoundneſs of her humility.

The Phariſee, who had attentively obſerved the woman, concluded from thence, that our Saviour could not be a prophet. "This man (ſaid the Phariſee to himſelf) if he were a prophet, would have known who, and what manner of woman that is, that toucheth him; for ſhe is a ſinner. *Luke* viii. 39.

But though Simon ſpoke this only in his heart, his thoughts were not concealed from the great Redeemer

of mankind, who, to convince him that he was a prophet, and that he knew not only the characters of men, but even the ſecret thoughts of their hearts, immediately converſed with him on the very ſubject he had been revolving in his mind. He did not indeed expoſe him, before the company, by relating what he had ſaid in ſecret, but with remarkable delicacy, pointed out to Simon alone, the unreaſonableneſs of his thoughts. "Simon (ſaid the bleſſed Jeſus) I have ſomething to ſay to thee. There was a certain creditor, who had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him moſt? Simon anſwered, and ſaid, I ſuppoſe that he to whom he forgave moſt. And he ſaid unto him, thou haſt rightly judged." And then immediately applied this ſhort parable to the ſubject of the woman, on which the Phariſee had ſo unjuſtly reaſoned with himſelf. "Simon (continued our Saviour) ſeeſt thou this woman: I entered into thine houſe, thou gaveſt me no water for my feet: but ſhe hath waſhed my feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gaveſt me no kiſs: but this woman, ſince the time I came in, hath not ceaſed to kiſs my feet. Mine head with oil thou didſt not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment." *Luke* vii. 44, &c.

This woman's kind ſervices were in no danger of loſing their reward, from the bleſſed Jeſus, who poſſeſſed the ſofter and finer feelings of human nature, in their utmoſt perfection. Accordingly he added, in purſuance of the kind invitation he had before made, to weary and heavy laden ſinners, "Wherefore, I ſay unto thee, her ſins which are many, are forgiven; for ſhe loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the ſame loveth little." *Luke* vii. 47.

The bleſſed Jeſus having thus commended the conduct of the woman, to the company; and rebuked with great delicacy, the unjuſt ſuſpicions of Simon, turned himſelf to the woman, and in the kindeſt manner, aſſured her, that "her ſins were forgiven." But the power he aſſumed in forgiving ſins, greatly offended the Jews, who not being acquainted with his divinity, conſidered his ſpeech as derogatory to the honour of the Almighty. Jeſus however, contemned their malicious murmurs, and repeated his aſſurance, telling the woman

woman that her faith had ſaved her, and bidding her depart in peace.

The next day Jeſus travelled from Capernaum to different parts of Galilee, going "through every village, preaching and ſhewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God." *Luke* viii. 1. That is, he declared to the people, the welcome tidings of the Almighty's being willing to be reconciled to the children of men, on condition of their repentance, and embracing the Goſpel of the grace of God.

Leaving Galilee, he repaired to Jeruſalem, to keep the paſſover, being the ſecond feaſt of that kind, ſince his public miniſtry. In this journey he was accompanied by certain pious women, "who miniſtered to him of their ſubſtance."

CHAP. XII.

Miraculous Cure effected, at the Pool of Bethesda. Reproof of the ſuperſtition of the Jews, in condemning the Performance of neceſſary Works on the Sabbath. After doing many Acts of Mercy and Wonder, our bleſſed Lord is viſited by his Mother and Brethren, on which incident he makes a ſpiritual Reflection.

OUR Lord had no ſooner entered the ancient city of Jeruſalem, ſo long famous for being the dwelling-place of the Moſt High, than he repaired to the public bath, or pool, called in the Hebrew tongue, *Bethesda*, that is, *the houſe of mercy*, on account of the miracles wrought there, by the ſalutary effects of the water, at certain ſeaſons. This bath was ſurrounded by five porches or cloiſters, in which thoſe who frequented the place, were ſheltered both from the heat and cold; and were particularly ſerviceable to the diſeaſed and infirm, who crowded thither to find relief in their afflictions.

Theſe porches were now filled with a "great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel deſcended into the pool, and troubled the water, Whoſoever then firſt, after the troubling of the water, ſtepped in, was made whole of whatſoever diſeaſe he had." *John* v. 3. 4.

This is the account of this miraculous pool given us by St. John, the only writer who has mentioned it. Many controverſies have ariſen, concerning the place, the time, and the nature of the pool; queſtions which will perhaps never be anſwered, becauſe the pool of Bethesda is not mentioned by any Jewiſh writer, ſacred or prophane.

The time, when this miraculous effect took place, cannot be determined;

mined; but it is almoſt univerſally agreed, that it could not be long before the coming of our Saviour; and that the miracle was intended to lead us to the Son of God. For the gift of prophecy and of miracle, had ceaſed among the Jews, for above four hundred years; and therefore to raiſe in them a more ardent deſire for the coming of the Meſſiah, and to induce them to be more circumſpect in obſerving the ſigns of his coming, God was pleaſed to favour them with this remarkable ſign at Bethesda. And as the deſcendants of Jacob, in the laſt times, were very obnoxious, not only to the irruptions and tyranny of the Gentiles, but had wholly loſt their liberty; ſo God favoured them with this eminent token of his favour, this wonderful pool, that they might not deſpair of the promiſes made to their forefathers being fulfilled.

The pool was ſituated near the gate of victims, which were figures of the propitiatory ſacrifice of Chriſt, that they might be convinced God had yet a regard to the poſterity of Abraham, and the worſhip which he himſelf had eſtabliſhed; and might thus ſupport themſelves with the pleaſing hope of the coming of the Meſſiah, the great Angel of the covenant, to his temple.

And as this miracle of the angel deſcending from heaven, began when the coming of the Meſſiah was at hand, to adviſe them of the ſpeedy and near approach of that promiſed ſalvation; ſo Chriſt entered theſe porches, which were ſituated without the temple, and performed the miracle which will preſently be related, to indicate what was the true intent of this gift of healing, namely, to lead men to himſelf, "the fountain opened for ſin and for uncleanneſs." The waters were troubled only at this certain ſeaſon of the paſſover, or at other ſtated periods, and one only healed each time the angel deſcended, to ſhew them at once the weakneſs of the law, and the great difference between that, and the goſpel diſpenſation; and to teach them not to reſt ſatisfied with the corporeal benefit only, as in the miniſtration of an angel, but to reflect attentively on the promiſes of the Meſſiah's approaching advent.

Such remarks, we conceive, will not be unacceptable to the reader, with reſpect to the celebrated pool, and ſhall now return to our Saviour, who thought proper to viſit the porches of Bethesda, now crowded with perſons labouring under divers diſeaſes.

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Among these objects of pity was one who had laboured under his infirmity no less than thirty and eight years. The length and greatness of this man's affliction, which were well known to the Son of God, were sufficient to excite his tender compassion, and make him the happy object to demonstrate that his power of healing was infinitely superior to the sanative virtue of the waters; while the rest were suffered to remain in their affliction.

Had our Lord at this time restored none of them to health, he would have acted contrary to the general account which the Evangelists give of his goodness on other occasions, namely, "that he healed all who came unto him." For such deceased persons who left their habitations through a persuasion of his power and kindness, were proper objects of his mercy; whereas the sick in the cloisters of Bethesda were no more so than the other sick, throughout the whole country, whom he could have cured with a single word of his mouth, had he been pleased to to have uttered it.

Our compassionate Lord now approached the man whom he had singled out as the person on whom to manifest his power. He asked him whether he was desirous of being made whole? A question which must induce the man to declare publicly his melancholy case, in the hearing of the multitude, and, consequently, render the miracle more conspicuous. And as this was done on the sabbath-day, our blessed Saviour seems to have wrought it, to rouse the sons of Jacob from their lethargy, and convince the inhabitants of Jerusalem that the long expected Messiah was now come, and that "God had actually visited his people."

This distressed mortal beholding Jesus with a sorrowful countenance, and understanding that he meant his being healed by the immediate virtue of the waters, answered in a plaintive accent, "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me in the pool: but while I am coming down, another steppeth down before me." *John* v. 7. But the beneficent Redeemer soon convinced him that he was not to owe his cure to the salutary nature of the waters, but to the unbounded power of the Son of God; and accordingly said to him, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk." Nor was the heavenly mandate any sooner uttered, than the impotent man, to the astonishment of the multitude, "was made whole,

and took up his bed, and walked." *John* v. 9.

This miraculous atchievement could not fail of having a proper effect on the ſpectators; and his carrying his bed on the ſabbath-day, which the Jews conſidered as a profanation of that day of reſt, tended greatly to ſpread the fame of the miracle over the whole city. Nor did the man ſcruple to obey the commands of his kind phyſician: he well knew that the perſon who had the power of working ſuch miracles, muſt be a great prophet; and, conſequently, that his injunction could not be ſinful. He therefore thought that he gave a ſufficient anſwer to thoſe Jews, who told him it was not lawful to carry his bed on the ſabbath-day, to ſay, "He that made me whole, the ſame ſaid unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk." *John* v. 11. He that reſtored my ſtrength, in an inſtant, and removed, with a ſingle word, a diſeaſe that had many years afflicted me, commanded me at the ſame time, to take up my bed and walk; and ſurely a perſon endued with ſuch power from on high, could not have ordered me to do any thing but what is truly right.

The votaries of infidelity ſhould remember, that this ſignal miracle was performed in an inſtant, and even when the perſon did not expect any ſuch favour, nor even knew the perſon to whom he owed it. No one, therefore, can pretend that imagination had any ſhare in performing it. In ſhort, the narrative of this miracle of mercy ſufficiently proves, that the perſon who performed it was really divine.

Soon after the miracle was performed, Jeſus met in the temple the man he had healed at the pool of Betheſda; and took the opportunity of reminding him, that as he was now freed from an infirmity he had brought on himſelf by irregular courſes, he ſhould be careful to abſtain from them, for the future, leſt the Almighty ſhould think proper to afflict him in a more terrible manner. The man, overjoyed at having found the divine phyſician, who had relieved him from his melancholy condition, repaired to the Scribes and Phariſees, and, with a heart overflowing with gratitude, innocently told them, that it was Jeſus who had performed on him ſo aſtoniſhing a cure; being, doubtleſs, perſuaded that they would rejoice at beholding ſo great a prophet.

But, alas! this was far from being the caſe; the rulers of Iſrael, inſtead of

of being pleaſed with accounts of his many ſtupendous works of mercy and kindneſs, attacked him tumultuouſly in the temple, and carried him before the Sanhedrim, probably with an intention to take away his life, merely becauſe he had done good on the ſabbath-day.

Jeſus, however, ſoon vindicated, by irrefragable arguments, the propriety of his works; obſerving, that in performing works of mercy and beneficence, on the ſabbath day, he only imitated his heavenly Father, the God of Jacob, whoſe providence was continually employed, without any regard to times or ſeaſons, in doing good for the children of men. And ſurely he muſt be more than blind, who cannot diſcover, that the Almighty, on the ſabbaths, as well as on other days, ſupports the whole frame of the univerſe; and, by the inviſible operations of his power, continues the motion of the heavenly bodies, on the revolution of which the viciſſitude of day and night, of ſummer and winter, ſo neceſſary to the production of the fruit of the earth, depend.

But the Jewiſh prejudice could not be overcome by argument. Nay, the very apology increaſed their malice, as he claimed a peculiar relation to God; and by aſſerting that he acted like him, inſinuated that he was equal to the Almighty himſelf.

The Saviour of the world did not deny this concluſion; but ſhewed that he acted agreeably to the will of God, doing whatſoever the Father commiſſioned him to perform. "Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, The Son can do nothing of himſelf, but what he ſeeth the Father do; for what things ſoever he doeth, theſe alſo doeth the Son likewiſe. For the Father loveth the Son, and ſheweth him all things that himſelf doeth: and he will ſhew him greater works than theſe, that ye may marvel." *John* v. 19, 20.

The bleſſed Jeſus added, that he had not only power to heal the ſick, but even to raiſe the dead; and that his Father had conſtituted him the univerſal judge of the world: and therefore thoſe who refuſed to honour him, refuſed to honour the Father. But whoever believed on him, ſhould inherit eternal life.

And that they might not doubt of the truth of his miſſion, but that he was actually inveſted with the power of raiſing the dead, he deſired them to remember the undoubted inſtances he had already given of it, in reſtoring the daughter of Jairus,

and

and the widow's ſon of Nain, to life: and conſequently, that he could, on any future occaſion, exert the ſame power: "Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead ſhall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear ſhall live. For as the Father hath life in himſelf, ſo hath he given to the Son to have life in himſelf: And hath given him authority to execute judgment alſo, becauſe he is the Son of Man." *John* v. 25, &c.

Our Lord added to this, Be not ſurpriſed at the power of raiſing a few individuals from the dead, and the authority of inflicting puniſhment on a ſmall number of the human race, I have a far greater power committed to me, even that of raiſing all the ſons of Adam, at the laſt day, and of judging and rewarding every one of them according to his works. "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the grave ſhall hear his voice, and ſhall come forth; they that have done good, unto the reſurrection of life: and they that have done evil, unto the reſurrection of damnation." *John* v. 28, 29.

The great day of tribulation will diſtinguiſh between the good and the evil; for the tremendous Judge has been privy to all the actions of the ſons of men, from the beginning to the end of time; nor has he any intereſt to purſue, or any inclination to ſatisfy, different from thoſe of his heavenly Father. "And my judgment is juſt; becauſe I ſeek not mine own will, but the will of the Father, which hath ſent me." *John* v. 30.

Nothing could more evince the character of our Lord, than theſe aſſertions; though he did not require his hearers to believe them merely on his own teſtimony; he appealed to that of John, who was a burning and a ſhining light: and in whom, for a time, they greatly rejoiced, becauſe the prophetic ſpirit, which had ſo long ceaſed in Iſrael, was revived in that holy man. Nay he appealed to a much greater teſtimony than that of John, even that of the God of Jacob himſelf, who was continually bearing witneſs to the truth of his miſſion, by the many miracles he empowered him to perform; and who, at his baptiſm, had, in an audible voice from the courts of heaven, declared him to be his beloved Son; a voice which multitudes of people had heard, and probably even ſome of thoſe to whom he was now ſpeaking.

The Jews had long expected the Meſſiah:

Meſſiah: but they had expected him to appear as a temporal prince who would not only reſtore the former luſture of the throne of David, but infinitely augment it, and even place it over all the kingdoms of the earth. And hence they were unwilling to acknowledge Jeſus for their Meſſiah, notwithſtanding the proofs of his miſſion were ſo undeniable, becauſe they muſt, in ſo doing, have abandoned all their grand ideas of a temporal kingdom. Our bleſſed Saviour, therefore, deſired them to conſult their own ſcriptures, particularly the writings of the prophets, where they would find the characters of the Meſſiah diſplayed; and be fully convinced they were all fulfilled in his perſon.

He alſo gave them to underſtand, that the proofs of his miſſion were as full and clear as poſſible, being ſupported by the actions of his life, which in all things agreed with his doctrine: for he never ſought the applauſe of men, or affected ſecular power, but was always innocent and humble, though he well knew that theſe virtues made him appear little in the eyes of thoſe who had no idea of a ſpiritual kingdom, but expected the Meſſiah would appear in all the pomp of ſecular authority.

In ſhort, the fatal infidelity of the Jews was principally owing to their pride. They had long filled the minds of the people with grand ideas of the glory and power of the Meſſiah's kingdom: they had repreſented him as a potent prince, who was to appear at once adorned with all the enſigns of power: and therefore to have aſcribed that auguſt character to a mere teacher of righteouſneſs, deſtitute even of the ordinary advantages of birth, fortune, and erudition, would have been ſo plain a confeſſion of their ignorance of the ſcriptures, as muſt have expoſed them to the ridicule and contempt of the whole people.

Our bleſſed Saviour added, that he himſelf ſhould not be their accuſer to the God of Jacob, for their infidelity; but Moſes, their great legiſlator, in whom they truſted, would join in that unwelcome office; for by denying him to the Meſſiah, they denied the writings of that Prophet. "For had ye (added he) believed Moſes, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me: but if ye believe not his writings, how ſhall ye believe my words?" *John* v. 46, 47.

Thus did the bleſſed Jeſus aſſert himſelf to be the Son of God, the

great judge of the whole earth, and the Meſſiah promiſed by the prophets; and at the ſame time gave them ſuch convincing proofs of his being ſent from God, that nothing could be ſaid againſt them.

Convincing as theſe proofs were, yet it did not in the leaſt abate the malice of the Scribes and Phariſees; for the very next ſabbath, upon his diſciples plucking a few ears of corn as they paſſed through the fields, and eating the grain after rubbing it out in their hands, they again exclaimed againſt this violation of the ſabbath. But our bleſſed Saviour ſoon convinced them of their [illegible]or, by ſhewing, both from the ex[illegible]ple David, and the conſtant practi[illegible] of their own prieſts, who never omitted the neceſſary works of the temple, on the ſabbath day, that works of neceſſity were often permitted, even though they break a ritual command; that acts of mercy were the moſt acceptable ſervices to God, on any day whatever: that it was inverting the order of things, to ſuppoſe that "man was made for the ſabbath, and not the ſabbath for man." Adding, that if the ſervice of the temple ſhould be ſaid to claim a particular diſpenſation from the law of the ſabbath, he and his diſciples, whoſe buſineſs of promoting the ſalvation of mankind was of equal importance, might juſtly claim the ſame exemption: as they were carrying on a much nobler work, than the prieſt who attended on the ſervice of the temple. Thus did our bleſſed Savious prove, that works of mercy ſhould not be left undone, though attended with the violation of ſome of the moſt ſacred inſtitutions of the ceremonial law.

Soon after this diſpute with the Scribes and Phariſees, our bleſſed Saviour entered one of the ſynagogues of Jeruſalem, on the ſabbath day, and found there a man whoſe right hand was withered.

The Phariſees, who obſerved the compaſſionate Jeſus advance towards the man, did not doubt but he would attempt to heal him; and therefore, watched him attentively, that they might have ſomething to accuſe him with to the people. Their hypocriſy was arrived to that monſtrous pitch, that they determined to blaſt his reputation, by repreſenting him as a ſabbath-breaker, if he dared to heal the man, while they themſelves were prophaning it by an action, which would have polluted any day; namely, of ſeeking an opportunity to deſtroy a perſon who had never injured them,

them, but done many good actions for the ſons of Jacob, and was continually labouring for their eternal welfare.

The Saviour of the world was not unappriſed of theſe malicious intentions. He knew their deſigns, and defied their impotent power, by informing them of the benevolent action he deſigned, though he knew they would exert every art they were maſters of, in order to put him to death.

Therefore when our Saviour ordered the man to ſhew himſelf to the whole congregation, in order to excite their pity, theſe hypocritical teachers declared, in the ſtrongeſt terms, the unlawfulneſs of his performing even ſuch beneficent actions on the ſabbath; "Is it lawful to heal on the ſabbath-day?" They did not, however, aſk this queſtion, with an intention to hinder him from performing the miracle. No, they had a very different intention, than that of accuſing him. For they hoped he would have declared openly that ſuch actions were lawful; or at leaſt make no reply to their demands, which they would have conſtrued into an acknowledgment of what they aſſerted.

Nor did our Lord fail to expoſe their malice and ſuperſtition: and accordingly aſked them, "Is it lawful on the ſabbath-days to do good, or to do evil? to ſave life, or to deſtroy it?" *Luke* vi. 9. Is it not more lawful for me, on the ſabbath-day, to ſave men's lives, than for you to ſeek my death, without the leaſt provocation?" This ſevere rebuke would admit of no anſwer, and therefore, they "held their peace," pretending not to underſtand his meaning. He therefore made uſe of an argument, which ſtupidity itſelf could not fail of underſtanding, and which all the art of theſe hypocritical ſophiſts were unable to anſwer. "What man (ſaid the bleſſed Jeſus) ſhall there be among you, that ſhall have one ſheep, and if it fall into the pit on the ſabbath-day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a ſheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the ſabbath days." *Matt.* xii. 11, 12.

The former queſtion they pretended not to underſtand, and therefore held their peace; but this argument effectually ſilenced them, though they were determined not to be convinced. This unconquerable obſtinacy grieved the ſpirit of the meek, the benevolent Jeſus, who beheld them with anger, that, if poſſible, an impreſſion might be made,

made, either on them or the ſpectators.

But at the ſame time that he teſtified his diſpleaſure towards the Phariſees, he uttered words of comfort to the lame man, bidding him ſtretch forth his hand; and he no ſooner obeyed the divine command, than his hand was reſtored whole as the other.

This aſtoniſhing work, performed in the midſt of a congregation, many of whom, doubtleſs, knew the man while he laboured under this infirmity, and in preſence of his moſt inveterate enemies, muſt certainly have had a great effect on the minds of the people, eſpecially as they ſaw that it had effectually ſilenced the Phariſees, who had nothing to offer, either againſt the miracle itſelf, or the reaſonings and power of him who had performed it.

But though theſe whited ſepulchres, as our bleſſed Saviour juſtly termed them, were ſilenced by his arguments, and aſtoniſhed at his miracles, yet they were ſo far from abandoning their malicious intentions, that they joined their inveterate enemies, the Herodians, or Sadducees, in order to conſult how they might deſtroy him; well knowing, that if he continued his preaching, and working of miracles, the people would wholly follow him, and their own power ſoon become contemptible. Jeſus, however, thought proper to prevent their malicious deſigns, by retiring into Galilee, to the borders of the lake of Chinereth.

This retreat could not, however, conceal him from the multitude, who flocked to him from all quarters, bringing with them the ſick and the maimed, who were all healed, and ſent away in peace.

Some of his diſciples, however, who ſtill entertained the popular opinion, that the Meſſiah would eſtabliſh his kingdom by force, and bear down all oppoſition, were extremely mortified to find their maſter retreat from ſo weak an enemy. But had they read with attention the prophecy of Iſaiah, they would have known that this weakneſs was one part of the Meſſiah's character. "Behold my ſervant, whom I have choſen; my beloved, in whom my ſoul is well pleaſed: I will put my ſpirit upon him, and he ſhall ſhew judgment to the Gentiles. He ſhall not ſtrive, nor cry; neither ſhall any man hear his voice in the ſtreets. A bruiſed reed ſhall he not break, and ſmoking flax ſhall he not quench, till he ſendeth forth judgment unto victory. And

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in his name ſhall the Gentiles truſt." *Matt.* xii. 18, &c.

Though there are ſeveral ſmall variations between this prophecy, as quoted by St. Matthew, and the original, in the book of Iſaiah; yet the ſenſe in both places is the ſame.—And we cannot help obſerving, that there is in this prophecy an evident contraſt between the publication of the Jewiſh religion, by Moſes, and the Chriſtian religion by Chriſt. The doctrine of ſalvation, as taught by Moſes, extended only to the ſingle nation of the Jews: whereas that publiſhed by the Meſſiah extends to every nation and people under heaven. Accordingly our bleſſed Saviour by retiring into Galilee, fulfilled the firſt part of this famous prophecy, "He ſhall ſhew judgment to the Gentiles;" for the Evangeliſt tells us, great multitudes came to him from beyond Jordan, and from Syria, about Tyre and Sidon. *Mark.* iii. 8.

Being now returned into Galilee, there was brought to him a blind and dumb man, poſſeſſed with a devil; but Jeſus, with a ſingle word, caſt out the evil ſpirit, and reſtored the noble faculties of ſight and ſpeech. A miracle ſo ſurpriſing could not fail of aſtoniſhing the numerous ſpectators, who now ſeemed convinced that the perſon endued with ſuch remarkable power, could be no other than the Meſſiah, *the Son of David.*

The Phariſees, who were come thither from Jeruſalem, filled with malice at ſeeing him perform ſo many miracles, impiouſly aſſerted, contrary to the conviction of their own minds, that they were wrought by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of the devils.

So blaſphemous a declaration could not be ſuppoſed to eſcape a cenſure from the ſon of God, who addreſſing himſelf both to them and the people, demonſtrated the abſurdity of the calumny, by an argument drawn from the common affairs of life. "Every kingdom (ſaid the bleſſed Jeſus) divided againſt itſelf, is brought to deſolation: and every city or houſe divided againſt itſelf ſhall not ſtand. And if Satan caſt out Satan, he is divided againſt himſelf, how then ſhall his kingdom ſtand?" Your calumny is malicious and abſurd; it is malicious, becauſe your own conſciences are convinced of its falſehood: and it is abſurd, becauſe Satan cannot aſſiſt me in preaching the kingdom of God, and deſtroying all the works of darkneſs, unleſs he be divided againſt himſelf, and deſtroy all the works of

his own kingdom. Adding, "And if I by Beelzebub caſt out devils, by whom do your children caſt them out? therefore they ſhall be your judges. But if I caſt out devils by the ſpirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you." Ye did not impute the miracles of your prophets to Beelzebub, but received them, on the evidence of their miracles, as the meſſengers of God. But ye reject me, who work greater, and more numerous miracles than they, and impute them to the power of evil ſpirits. Is this conduct reconcileable? Theſe prophets, therefore, ſhall be your judges, they ſhall condemn you. But as it is true, that I caſt out devils, by the aſſiſtance of the Almighty, it follows that the kingdom of God, ſo long expected, is about to be eſtabliſhed.

But this blaſphemy, however great, may be forgiven you, becauſe ſtronger and more evident proofs of my miſſion may convince you of your ſins, and induce you to embrace the offers of eternal life. And the time is coming, when the Son of Man ſhall be raiſed from the dead, by the power of God, the gift of miracles ſhowered on almoſt all believers, and the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom more fully explained, in order to remove the foundation of your prejudice, the expectation of a temporal prince. But if you then ſhut your eyes, and ſpeak evil againſt the Holy Spirit, by affirming that his gifts and miracles proceed from the prince of darkneſs, it ſhall never be forgiven you: becauſe it is a ſin you cannot poſſibly repent of, as no greater means of conviction will be offered; but you ſhall be puniſhed for it, both in this world, and in that which is to come. "Wherefore I ſay unto you, All manner of ſin and blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto men; but the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven unto men. And whoſoever ſpeaketh a word againſt the ſon of man, it ſhall be forgiven him: but whoſoever ſpeaketh againſt the Holy Spirit, it ſhall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come."—*Matt.* xii. 31, 32.

This ſolemn ſentence on the ſin againſt the Holy Spirit, was probably now pronounced by our Saviour, to awaken the conſciences of the Phariſees, by a ſenſe of their danger, if they continued in ſuch deteſtable calumnies, when their own hearts ſufficiently told them that they flowed intirely from malice and reſentment.

But all his reaſonings and threatnings had no effect on this perverſe ſet of mortals, who ſarcaſtically an-

ſwered, "Maſter, we would ſee a ſign from thee." Strange ſtupidity! Had not he, the moment before, caſt out a devil, and reſtored the faculties of ſight and ſpeech to the blind and dumb; cleanſed lepers, raiſed the dead, and even rebuked the tempeſtuous winds and waves? Were not theſe ſigns ſufficient to convince the moſt bigotted mortal? What therefore could theſe ſtubborn doctors of the law require? Well might the great Saviour of the world call them, "a wicked and adulterous generation;" for ſurely they could boaſt of no part of the faith and piety of Abraham, their great progenitor. Perſons of ſuch incorrigible inclinations certainly merited no indulgence; and accordingly, Jeſus told them they ſhould have no other ſign given them, but what they every day beheld, the ſign of the prophet Jonas, who by lying three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, was a type of the Son of God, who ſhould continue three days and three nights in the chambers of the tomb. Adding, that the Ninevites repented at the preaching of the prophet Jonas: and the queen of the ſouth undertook a long journey to Jeruſalem, to hear the wiſdom of Solomon; but they refuſed to attend to the doctrines of an infinitely greater prophet than Jonas, or liſten to one much wiſer than Solomon. Concluding his diſcourſe with a very appoſite parable, tending to ſhew the great danger of reſiſting conviction, and breaking through reſolutions, as ſuch actions tended entirely to render men more obdurate and abandoned than before.

During this diſpute with the Phariſees, Jeſus was informed that his mother, and brethren, or kinſmen, were without, deſiring to ſpeak to him: upon which the bleſſed Jeſus ſtretched out his hands towards his diſciples, and ſaid, "Behold my mother and my brethren! For whoſoever ſhall do the will of my Father, which is in heaven, the ſame is my brother, and ſiſter, and mother." *Matt.* xii. 49, 50. This glorious truth ſhould be enſtamped on the minds of all believers, as it ſhews that every one, of what nation or kindred ſoever, that is brought into ſubjection to the will of God, is allied to the bleſſed Jeſus, and intitled to the ſalvation of God.

CHAP. XIII.

Our Lord delivers many remarkable Parables, and explains ſeveral of them. Returns to Nazareth, and commiſſions the twelve Apoſtles, whom he had before ſelected as his conſtant Attendants and Followers, to diſperſe and

and preach the Goſpel of the Kingdom of God, in divers Places. After the Death of John the Baptiſt, the Apoſtles return to Nazareth.

THE miraculous power of our bleſſed Lord, both in performing the moſt aſtoniſhing acts, and confuting the moſt learned of the Phariſaical tribe, who endeavoured to oppoſe his miſſion and doctrine, brought together ſo great a multitude, that he repaired to the ſea-ſide; and for the better inſtructing the people, he entered into a ſhip, and the whole multitude ſtood on the ſhore. Being thus conveniently ſeated, he delivered many precepts of the utmoſt importance, beginning with the parable of the ſower, who caſt his ſeed on different kinds of ſoil, the products of which were anſwerable to the nature of the ground, ſome yielding a large increaſe, others nothing at all. By this elegant ſimilitude, the bleſſed Jeſus repreſented the different kinds of hearers, and the different manner in which they are affected, by the precepts of religion. Some wholly ſuppreſs the doctrines delivered, in others they produce the fruits of righteouſneſs, in proportion to the goodneſs of their hearts. And ſurely a more proper parable could not have been delivered when ſuch multitudes came to hear his diſcourſes, and ſo few practiſed the precepts, or profited by the heavenly doctrines they contained.

To vindicate the propriety of our Saviour's conduct, it may not be amiſs here to obſerve, that parables were very familiar to the oriental nations, particularly thoſe of Paleſtine, as we learn from the concurrent teſtimony of all the eaſtern writers: and it was the general method, both of the old prophets, John the Baptiſt, and our bleſſed Saviour himſelf, to allude to things preſent, and ſuch as immediately offered themſelves. Our Saviour alſo, by uſing this manner of teaching, fulfilled the prophecies concerning the Meſſiah, relating to his method of inſtruction, it being foretold, "that he ſhould open his mouth in parables; and utter things which had been kept ſecret from the foundation of the world." It is therefore no wonder that the myſteries and ſecrets of the kingdom of heaven are generally the ſubject of our Saviour's parables: his grand and fundamental doctrines being delivered in clear, plain, and expreſs terms, but ſometimes heightened and enlivened by the addition of beautiful parables. Similitudes of this kind are, indeed, the

the moſt ſimple method of teaching, and beſt accomodated to the apprehenſion of the vulgar and unlearned, and very eaſy to be remembered, underſtood, and applied. At the ſame time, they are the fineſt veil for myſteries, and the beſt means of convicting the proud and obſtinate, as well as concealing from him thoſe truths, which his perverſeneſs and infidelity rendered him unworthy of having more clearly diſplayed.

But to return. The parable being finiſhed, his diſciples aſked, why he taught the people in parables? to which he anſwered, "Becauſe it is given unto you to know the myſteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whoſoever hath, to him ſhall be given, and he ſhall have more abundance: but whoſoever hath not, from him ſhall be taken away, even that he hath. Therefore ſpeak I to them in parables; becauſe they ſeeing, ſee not: and hearing, they hear not, neither do they underſtand." *Matt.* xiii. 11, &c. As if he had ſaid, You, my beloved diſciples, who are of an humble, docile temper, and are willing to uſe means, and reſort to me for inſtruction, and the explanation of the truths I deliver; to you it ſhall be no diſadvantage, that they are cloathed in parables. Beſides, my diſcourſes are plain and intelligible to all unprejudiced minds: truth will ſhine through the veil in which it is arrayed, and the ſhadow will guide you to the ſubſtance. But theſe proud, theſe ſelf-conceited Phariſees, who are ſo blinded by their own prejudices, that they will neither hear nor underſtand a thing plainly delivered: to them I preach in parables, and hide the great truth of the Goſpel, under ſuch metaphorical robes, as will for ever conceal them from perſons of their temper. They have, therefore, brought upon themſelves this blindneſs, that in ſeeing they ſee not, and this wilful deafneſs, that in hearing they hear not, neither do they underſtand.

The bleſſed Jeſus added, that there was no reaſon for their being ſurpriſed at what he had told them, as it had long before been predicted by the prophet Iſaiah. "By hearing, ye ſhall hear, and ſhall not underſtand; and ſeeing ye ſhall ſee, and ſhall not perceive. For this people's heart is waxed groſs, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they cloſed; leſt at any time they ſhould ſee with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and ſhould underſtand with their heart, and ſhould be converted

verted, and I ſhould heal them." *Matt.* xiii. 14, 15. There is ſome variation in the words, as quoted by the Evangeliſt, and thoſe found in Iſaiah, but the import of both is the ſame, and may be paraphraſed, in the following manner; "The ſons of Jacob ſhall, indeed, hear the doctrines of the Goſpel, but not underſtand them; and ſee the miracles by which theſe doctrines are confirmed, without perceiving them to be wrought by the finger of God: not becauſe the evidences produced by the Meſſiah are inſufficient, but becauſe the corruption of their hearts will not ſuffer them to examine, and weigh theſe evidences; for the ſins of this people have hardened their hearts: their pride and vanity have ſhut their ears, and their hypocriſy and bigoted adherence to traditions and forced interpretations of the law and the prophets, have cloſed their eyes, leſt the brilliant rays of truth ſhould ſtrike their ſight with irreſiſtible force, and the powerful voice of divine wiſdom force their attention, and command their aſſent; being unwilling to be directed to the paths of righteouſneſs which lead to the heavenly Canaan."

Such are the reaſons given by our bleſſed Saviour for his teaching the people by parables; and to enhance the great privilege his diſciples enjoyed, he added, that many patriarchs and prophets of old had earneſtly deſired to ſee and hear theſe things which they ſaw and heard, but were denied that favour; God, having, till then, ſhewed them to his moſt eminent ſaints, in ſhadows only, and as they lay brooding in the womb of futurity. "But bleſſed are your eyes, for they ſee; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I ſay unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have deſired to ſee thoſe things which ye ſee, and have not ſeen them; and to hear thoſe things which ye hear, and have not heard them." *Matt.* xiii. 16.

Our Lord having, by theſe means, excited the deſire of his diſciples, proceeded to explain to them the parable of the ſower. "The ſower (ſaid he) ſoweth the word." The ſeed, therefore, implies the doctrines of true religion, and the various kinds of ſoil, the various kinds of hearers. The ground by the highway ſide, which is apt to be beaten by men treading upon it, is an image of thoſe who have their hearts ſo hardened with impiety, that though they hear the Goſpel preached, it makes no impreſſion on their callous hearts, becauſe

cauſe they either hear it inattentively, or quickly forget the words of the preacher. And ſurely no ſimilitude could more ſtrongly repreſent this inſenſibility and inattention, than the beaten ground, bordering on the highway, into which this ſeed never entering, it is picked up by the fowls of the air, or trodden in pieces by the feet of paſſengers. "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and underſtandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was ſown in his heart: this is he which received ſeed by the way-ſide." *Matt.* xiii. 19.

We muſt not ſuppoſe, that the devil has the power of robbing hearers of their knowledge, by any immediate act of his own, becauſe he is ſaid to catch away the word ſown in their hearts, but by the opportunities they give the deceiver of mankind, for exerting his ſtrong temptations, and particularly thoſe which have a relation to their commerce with men: a circumſtance that could not eſcape the obſervation of St. Luke, who tells us, that the ſeed was trodden down, or deſtroyed, by their own headſtrong luſts, which, like ſo many birds pinched with hunger, devour the ſeed implanted in their minds.

The rocky ground repreſents thoſe hearers, who ſo far receive the word into their hearts, that it diſcovers itſelf by good reſolutions, which are, perhaps, accompanied with a partial reformation of ſome ſins, and the temporary practice of ſome virtues. But the word has not ſunk deep enough in their minds, to remain conſtantly there; its abode with them is only for a ſeaſon; and therefore when perſecution ariſeth for the ſake of the Goſpel, and ſuch hearers are expoſed to tribulations of any kind, the blade which ſprung up, quickly withers for want of being watered with the ſtreams of piety and virtue; like the vegetable productions of the earth, when deprived of the enlivening rains and dews of heaven, and a want of earth to contain this balmy fluid, when the rays of the ſun dart in full vigour upon them, "But he that received the ſeed into ſtony places, the ſame is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himſelf, but dureth for a while: ſo when tribulation or perſecution ariſeth, becauſe of the word, by and by he is offended." *Matt.* xiii. 20, 21.

The ground encumbered with thorns, which ſprung up with the ſeed, and choaked it, repreſents all thoſe

thoſe who receive the word into hearts already filled with the cares of this world, which will, ſooner or later, deſtroy whatever good reſolutions are raiſed by the word. The cares of the world are compared to thorns, not only becauſe of their pernicious efficacy in choaking the word, but becauſe they cannot be eradicated, without great pain and difficulty. In the parable, the hearers of this denomination are diſtinguiſhed from thoſe who receive the ſeed on ſtony ground, not ſo much by the effect of the word upon their minds, as by the different natures of each; for in both the ſeed ſprang up, but brought forth no fruit. Thoſe repreſented by the ſtony ground have no depth of ſoil; thoſe by the thorny ground, are choaked by the cares of the world, by deceitfulneſs of riches, and the love of pleaſures, which, ſooner or later, will ſtifle the impreſſions of the word; by which means they at laſt become as unfruitful as the former. But both are diſtinguiſhed from thoſe hearers repreſented by the ſeed ſown by the highway-ſide, that they receive the word, and, in ſome meaſure, obey its precepts. Whereas the firſt never receive the word at all, hearing without attention; or if they do attend, forget it immediately. "He alſo that received ſeed among the thorns, is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulneſs of riches choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful." *Matt.* xiii. 22.

In oppoſition to theſe unprofitable hearers of the word, others are repreſented, whoſe goodneſs of heart (agreeable to the ſimilitude of the ſoil) receive the word with gladneſs, and bring forth larger increaſe. Theſe are convinced of the truths delivered and practiſe it, though contrary to their prejudices, and oppoſite to their inclinations. All thoſe bring forth, ſome an hundred fold, ſome ſixty, and ſome thirty, in proportion to the different degrees of ſtrength, in which they poſſeſs the graces neceſſary to the profitable hearing the word of righteouſneſs.

Having ended this interpretation of the parable of the ſower, he continued his diſcourſe to his diſciples, explaining to them, by the ſimilitude of a lighted lamp, the uſe they were expected to make of all the excellent inſtructions they had and ſhould receive from him. Their underſtanding, he told them, was to illumine the world, as a brilliant lamp placed in the center of an apartment, enlightens

lightens the whole. He added, that though ſome of the doctrines of the Goſpel were then concealed from the people, becauſe of their prejudices, yet the time would come when theſe doctrines ſhould be preached openly and plainly, through the world; and therefore it was their duty, to whom God had given both an opportunity of hearing, and a capacity of underſtanding theſe doctrines, to liſten with the utmoſt attention. "Is a candle brought to be put under a buſhel, or under a bed? and not to be ſet on a candleſtick? For there is nothing hid, which ſhall not be manifeſted: neither was any thing kept ſecret, but that it ſhould come abroad. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear." *Mark* iv. 21, 22, 23.

But as it was a matter of great importance that the diſciples, who were to publiſh the Goſpel throughout the whole world, ſhould liſten with the cloſeſt attention to his ſermons, he repeated his admonitions, adding, that their preſent privileges and future rewards ſhould be both proportioned to the fidelity and care with which they diſcharged the important truſt committed to them. "Take heed what you hear; with what meaſure you mete, it ſhall be meaſured to you; and unto you that hear ſhall more be given." *Mark* iv. 24.

Having explained theſe parables to his diſciples, he turned himſelf to the multitude on the ſhore, and, in his uſual endearing accent, delivered the parable of the enemy's ſowing tares among the wheat: and, on their firſt appearance, aſtoniſhing the huſbandman's ſervants, who knew the field had been ſown with good ſeed, in order to free the wheat from ſuch injurious plants, propoſed to root them up. But this the huſbandman abſolutely refuſed, leſt, by extirpating the one, they injured the other; adding, that he would take care, at the time of harveſt, to give orders to his reapers, that they firſt gathered the tares into bundles, and burned them, and afterwards to carry the wheat to the granaries. "The kingdom of heaven," ſaid the bleſſed Jeſus, "is likened unto a man, which ſowed good ſeed in his field: But while men ſlept, his enemy came and ſowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was ſprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares alſo. So the ſervant of the houſholder came, and ſaid unto him, Sir, didſt not thou ſow good ſeed in the field? From whence then hath it tares? He ſaith unto them, an enemy hath done this. The ſervants

ſaid unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he ſaid, nay: leſt while ye gather up the tares, ye root up alſo the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harveſt: and in the time of harveſt I will ſay to the reapers, Gather ye together firſt the tare, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn." *Matt.* xiii. 24, &c.

This parable of the tares being ended, he ſpake another, concerning the ſeed which ſprung up ſecretly, repreſenting the gradual and ſilent progreſs of the Goſpel among the ſons of men. He informed them, under this ſimilitude, that the huſbandman does not, by any efficacy of his own, cauſe the ſeed he caſts into the ground to grow, but leaves it to be nouriſhed by the teeming virtues of the ſoil, and the enlivening rays of the ſun: in the ſame manner Jeſus and his apoſtles, having taught men the doctrine of true religion, were not by any miraculous force to conſtrain the wills, far leſs by the terrors of fire and ſword to interpoſe viſibly in the aſſiſtance of it; but ſuffer it to ſpread by the ſecret influences of the holy ſpirit, till it attained its full effect. And as the huſbandman cannot, by the moſt diligent obſervation, perceive the corn in his field extending its dimenſions as it grows; ſo the miniſters of Chriſt were not, at the firſt planting of the Goſpel, to expect to ſee it make a quick progreſs through the world.

The miniſters of religion muſt not, however, from hence imagine, that religion will flouriſh without their carefully and importunately preſſing its precepts upon the minds of their hearers. The parable was ſpoke to inform the Jews in particular, that neither the Meſſiah nor his ſervants would employ force to eſtabliſh the kingdom of God, as they vainly expected the Meſſiah would have done; and to prevent the diſciples from fainting, when they ſaw that an immediate and rapid ſucceſs did not attend their labours. "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man ſhould caſt ſeed into the ground, and ſhould ſleep, and riſe night and day, and the ſeed ſhould ſpring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herſelf, firſt the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the ſickle, becauſe the harveſt is come." *Mark* iv. 26, &c.

The next parable he ſpake to the multitude

multitude was, that of the muſtard-ſeed, which though very ſmall when ſown, becomes in Paleſtine, and other parts of the Eaſt, a large ſpreading tree. Intimating to his audience, under this ſimilitude, that notwithſtanding the goſpel would at firſt appear contemptible, from the ignominy flowing from the crucifixion of its author, the difficulty of its precepts, the weakneſs of the perſons by whom it was preached, and the ſmall number and mean condition of thoſe who received it; yet being founded on truth itſelf, it would increaſe to an aſtoniſhing magnitude, filling the whole earth, and affording ſpiritual nouriſhment to perſons of all nations, who ſhould enjoy all the privileges of the Meſſiah's kingdom, equally with the Jews. And ſurely a more proper parable could not have been uttered, to encourage his diſciples to perſevere in the work of the miniſtry, notwithſtanding it would in the beginning be oppoſed by the learned, the rich, and the powerful. "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of muſtard ſeed, which a man took and ſowed in his field. Which indeed is the leaſt of all ſeeds; but when it is grown, it is the greateſt among herbs, and becometh a tree: ſo that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches threreof." *Matt.* xiii. 31, 32.

Our bleſſed Saviour concluded his diſcourſe to the multitude, with the parable of the leaven, to intimate the influence of the doctrine of the Goſpel on the minds of particular perſons; "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three meaſures of meal, till the whole was leavened." *Matt.* xiii. 33.

While Jeſus was thus employed in his heavenly Father's buſineſs, his mother and brethren came a ſecond time deſiring to ſee him. In all probability they feared that the continued fatigue of preaching would injure his health: and were therefore deſirous of taking him with them, that he might refreſh himſelf. But the bleſſed Jeſus, who was never weary of doing good, anſwered his indulgent parent as before, "My mother and my brethren are theſe which hear the word of God and do it." *Luke* viii. 21.

Night approaching, Jeſus diſmiſſed the multitude, and returned to the houſe in Capernaum, where he abode, and there explained to his diſciples the parable of the tares in the field. The huſbandman, our bleſſed Saviour;

our; the field, the Chriſtian church, planted in different parts of the world. The wheat are thoſe Chriſtians who obey the precepts of the Goſpel, and are ſupported by the influences of the holy Spirit; and the tares, the bad Chriſtians, ſeduced into the paths of vice, by the temptation of the devil. Our bleſſed Lord, therefore, by this parable, repreſented the mixed nature of the Church on earth, the diſmal end of the hypocrites, and thoſe who forget God; for thoſe may deceive for a time, by aſſuming the robes of virtue and religion; yet they will not fail, ſooner or later, to betray themſelves, and ſhow that they are only wolves in ſheep's cloathing. At the ſame time, however ſincerely we may wiſh to ſee the church freed from her corrupted members, we muſt not extirpate them by force, leſt, being deceived by outward appearance, we alſo deſtroy the wheat, or ſound members. We muſt leave this diſtinction to the awful day, when the great Meſſiah will deſcend to judgment; for then a ſeparation will be made, the wicked caſt into torments, that ſhall have no end, but the righteous received into life eternal, where they "ſhall ſhine forth, as the ſun, in the kingdom of their Father." *Matt.* xiii. 43.

Our Lord, on this occaſion, delivered the parable of the treaſure hid in the field, and of the pearl of great price. The former was deſigned to teach us that ſome meet with the Goſpel as it were by accident, and without ſeeking after it, agreeable to the prediction of the prophet, "That God is found of them that ſeek him not." *Iſa.* lxv. 1. But with regard to the latter, it was deſigned to intimate, that men ſometimes take the utmoſt pains to become acquainted with the great truths of the Goſpel. And ſurely the ſimilitudes, both of the treaſure and pearl, are very naturally uſed to ſignify the Goſpel: the former, as it enriches all who poſſeſs it; and the latter, becauſe it is more precious than rubies.

But that the diſciples muſt expect that the Chriſtian church would conſiſt of a mixed multitude of people, the good blended with the bad, in ſuch a manner, that it would be difficult to ſeparate them, he compared it to a net caſt into the ſea, which gathered fiſh of every kind, good and bad, which were ſeparated when the net was drawn to land; that is, at the laſt great day of accounts, when the righteous will be conveyed to life eternal, and the wicked caſt into everlaſting miſery.

Our

Our bleſſed Saviour, having finiſhed theſe parables, aſked his diſciples, if they underſtood them; and upon their anſwering in the affirmative, he added, that every teacher of the Goſpel ought to reſemble a perſon whoſe houſe was completely furniſhed, and brought "forth out of his treaſures things new and old."

Soon after Jeſus left Capernaum, and repaired to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and preached in the ſynagogue the glad tidings of the kingdom of God; but his townſmen, though aſtoniſhed at his doctrine, could not overcome the prejudices they had conceived againſt him, on account of the meanneſs of his family, and thence refuſed to own him for the Meſſiah. Our Saviour finding them the ſame incorrigible perſons as when he viſited them before, departed from them and taught in the neighbouring villages. They, in common with all the Jews, were ſtrangers to the true character of the Meſſiah, whom they conſidered as a temporal prince; and therefore could not bear that a perſon ſo mean as Jeſus appeared to be, ſhould perform works peculiar to that idol of their vanity, a glorious, triumphant, ſecular Meſſiah.

While our Lord reſided in the neighbourhood of Nazareth, he ſent out his diſciples to preach in different parts of Galilee, and to proclaim the glad tidings that God was then going to eſtabliſh the kingdom of the Meſſiah, wherein he would be worſhipped, in ſpirit and in truth. And in order that they might confirm the doctrines they delivered, and prove that they had received their commiſſion from the Son of God, they were endowed with the power of working miracles. How long they continued their preaching cannot be known, but it is reaſonable to think they ſpent a conſiderable time in it, preaching in ſeveral parts of Judea.

The miracles which the apoſtles wrought, raiſed the expectations of men higher than ever: the people were aſtoniſhed to ſee the diſciples of Jeſus perform ſuch miracles! and then concluded, that our Saviour muſt be greater than any of the old prophets, who could not tranſmit the power they enjoyed to any other: —This extraordinary circumſtance could not fail of ſpreading his fame through the whole country: it even reached the ears of Herod Antipos, who, fearing a perſon of ſuch extraordinary abilities, was very uneaſy; which ſome of his courtiers obſerv-

ing, endeavoured to remove, telling him, that one of the old prophets was riſen from the dead; but this did not ſatisfy him, and he declared that he believed it was John the Baptiſt riſen from the dead. "And he ſaid unto his ſervants, This is John the Baptiſt; he is riſen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do ſhew forth themſelves in him." *Matt.* xiv. 2.

The Evangeliſts having on this account mentioned John the Baptiſt, inform us that Herod had put him to death: but when this happened is uncertain.

It has already been obſerved, that Herod had caſt John into priſon for his boldneſs in reproving him for the adulterous commerce in which he lived with his brother's wife. The ſacred writers have not told us how long he continued in priſon; but it is plain from his two diſciples, who came from him to our Saviour, that his followers did not forſake him in his melancholy condition. Nay, Herod himſelf both reſpected and feared him, knowing that he was highly and deſervedly beloved by the people: he conſulted him often, and in many things followed his advice. But Herodias, his brother's wife, with whom he lived in ſo ſhameful a manner, being continually uneaſy leſt Herod ſhould be prevailed upon to ſet him at liberty, ſought all opportunities to deſtroy him; and at laſt an incident happened, which enabled her to accompliſh her intentions.

The King having, on his birth-day, made a great feaſt for his friends, ſhe ſent her daughter Salome, whom ſhe had by Philip, her lawful huſband, into the ſaloon, to dance before the king and his gueſts. Her performance was remarkably elegant, and ſo charmed Herod, that he promiſed, with an oath, to give her whatever ſhe aſked.

Having obtained ſo remarkable a promiſe, ſhe ran to her mother, deſiring to know what ſhe ſhould aſk? and was inſtructed by that wicked woman, to require the head of John the Baptiſt. Her mother's deſire, doubtleſs, ſurprized Salome, as ſhe could not poſſibly ſee the uſe of aſking what could be of no uſe to her. But Herodias would take no denial, peremptorily inſiſting on her demanding the head of the Baptiſt. Accordingly, ſhe turned to Herod, ſaying "I will thou give me, by and by, in a charger, the head of John the Baptiſt."

So cruel a requeſt thrilled every breaſt;

breaſt; the gaiety of the king was vaniſhed; he was vexed and confounded. But being unwilling to appear either raſh, fickle, or falſe, before a company of the firſt perſons of his kingdom, for rank and character, he commanded the head to be given her: not one of the gueſts having the courage to ſpeak a ſingle word in behalf of an innocent man, nor attempt to divert him from his mad purpoſe, though he gave them an opportunity of doing it, by ſignifying to them that he performed his oath, merely out of regard to the company. Thus Herod, through a miſplaced regard to his oath, and his gueſts, committed a moſt unjuſt and cruel action; an action that will for ever brand his memory with diſhonour, and render his very name deteſtable to the lateſt poſterity.

Soon after the command was given, the head of that venerable prophet, whoſe rebukes had ſtruck Herod with awe in his looſeſt moments, and whoſe exhortations had often excited him to virtuous actions, was brought pale and bloody, in a charger, and given to the daughter of Herodias, in the preſence of all the gueſts.

The young lady eagerly received the bloody preſent, and carried it to her mother, who enjoyed the whole pleaſure of revenge, and feaſted her eyes with the ſight of her enemy's head, now ſilent and harmleſs. But ſhe could not ſilence the voice of the Baptiſt; it became louder, filling the earth and heavens, and publiſhing to every people and nation this woman's baſeneſs and adultery.

Thus fell that great and good man, John the Baptiſt, who was proclaimed by our Saviour himſelf, to be *more than a prophet*. Joſephus tells us, that his whole crime conſiſted in exhorting the Jews to the love and practice of virtue; and in the firſt place to piety, juſtice, and regeneration, or newneſs of life; not by the bare abſtinence from this or that particular ſin, but by an habitual purity of mind and body.

It may not be improper, on this occaſion, to hint, that the hiſtory of this birth-day tranſmitted to poſterity in the ſcriptures, ſtands a perpetual beacon to warn the great, the gay, and the young, to beware of diſſolute mirth. Admoniſhed by ſo fatal an example, they ſhould be careful to maintain, in the midſt of their jollity, an habitual recollection of ſpirit, leſt reaſon, at any time, enervated by the pleaſures of ſenſe, ſhould ſlacken the rein of wiſdom, or let it drop, though only for a moment,

becauſe

becauſe their headſtrong paſſions, ever impatient of controul, may catch the opportunity, and ruſh with them into follies, whoſe conſequences will be unſpeakably, perhaps eternally bitter.

CHAP. XIV.

Our Lord adds to the Confirmation of his Miſſion and Doctrine, by working a Miracle in the Wilderneſs of Bethſaida. The People, ſtruck with the Power and Grace of the bleſſed Jeſus, propoſe to raiſe him to the earthly Dignity of King. Peter, by Means of his bleſſed Maſter, performs a Miracle, in walking upon the Sea. Our Lord's Improvement of the Miracles wrought in the Wilderneſs introduced in a Diſcourſe delivered in the Synagogues of Capernaum.

THE diſciples were ſo alarmed at the cruel fate of the Baptiſt, whoſe memory they highly revered, that they returned from their miſſion, and aſſiſted in performing the laſt offices to the body of their old maſter, many of the apoſtles having been originally diſciples of John. As ſoon as theſe pious rites were over, they repaired to Jeſus, and told him all that had happened.

Their compaſſionate Maſter, on hearing this melancholy news, retired with them by ſea into a deſart place, belonging to Bethſaida, that by retirement, meditation, and prayer, they might be refreſhed and recruited, for their ſpiritual labours; and, at the ſame time, leave an example to us that we ſhould often retire from the noiſe and hurry of the world, and offer up the moſt fervent prayers to our heavenly Father.

But the multitude attended ſo cloſely, that their departure was not long concealed; and great numbers of people repaired to the place, where they ſuppoſed Jeſus and his diſciples had ſecluded themſelves. Struck with the greatneſs of his miracles on thoſe that were ſick, and anxious to hear more inſtructions from the mouth of ſo divine a teacher, no difficulties were too great for them to ſurmount, nor any place too retired for them to penetrate, in ſearch of their admired preacher.

Nor was the beneficent Saviour of the world regardleſs of their pious eſteem. He ſaw them, he was moved with compaſſion towards them, becauſe they were as ſheep, not having a ſhepherd, multitudes of people without a paſtor, a large harveſt without labourers; motives abundantly ſufficient to excite compaſſion in the Son of God.

The ſituation of thoſe numerous throngs of people ſcattered abroad, without a guide, without a guardian: a large ſtock of defenceleſs ſheep, without

without a ſingle ſhepherd to defend them from the jaws of the infernal wolf, was truly deplorable; the bleſſed Jeſus, therefore, that good ſhepherd who came to lay down his life for the ſheep, was moved with pity towards them: the ſame pity which brought him from the courts of heaven, for the ſake of his loſt and wandering ſheep in the deſart, now brought him to this multitude of people, whom he inſtructed in the doctrines of eternal life; and, with his uſual goodneſs, healed all the ſick among them.

Intentionally devoted to teaching and healing the people, our bleſſed Saviour did not perceive the day to wear away, and that the greateſt part of it was already ſpent: but his diſciples, too anxious about the things of this world, thought proper to adviſe him of it; as if the Son of God wanted any directions from man. The day, ſaid the diſciples, is now far advanced, and the place a ſolitary deſart, where neither food nor lodging can be procured: it would therefore be convenient to diſmiſs the people, that they may repair to the towns or villages, on the borders of the wilderneſs, and provide themſelves with food and lodging, for they have nothing to eat.

But our Lord prevented that trouble, by telling them there was no neceſſity for ſending the people away to procure victuals for themſelves, as they might ſatisfy the hunger of the multitude, by giving them to eat. And at the ſame time to prove what opinion his diſciples entertained of his power, addreſſed himſelf to Philip, who was well acquainted with the country, and ſaid, Whence ſhall we buy bread, that thoſe may eat!

Philip, aſtoniſhed at the ſeeming impoſſibility of procuring a ſupply for ſo great a multitude, with the ſmall ſum of money which he knew was their all, and forgetting the extent of his Maſter's power, anſwered, "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not ſufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little." *John* vi. 7.

Our bleſſed Saviour might now have put the ſame queſtion to Philip, that he did on another occaſion, "Have I been ſo long time with you, and yet haſt thou not known me, Philip?" *John* xiv. 9. Haſt thou beheld ſo many miracles, and art ſtill ignorant that I can ſupply food, not only for this people, but for all the ſons of men, and for the cattle upon a thouſand hills?

But he contented himſelf with an-

ſwering, "Give ye them to eat." The twelve, not yet comprehending the deſign of their Maſter, repeated the objection of Philip; but added, that they were willing to expend their whole ſtock, in order to procure as large a ſupply, as poſſible, "Shall we go (ſaid they) and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, that they may eat?"

But this was by no means the deſign of their great Maſter, who, inſtead of making a direct anſwer to their queſtion, aſked them, "How many loaves have ye?" How much proviſion can be found among this multitude? go and ſee.

The diſciples obeyed the command of their Maſter; and Andrew ſoon returned to inform him, that the whole ſtock amounted to no more than five barley loaves, and two fiſhes; a quantity ſo inconſiderable, that it ſcarcely deſerved notice. What are they, ſaid this diſciple, among ſo many? What, indeed, would they have been among ſuch a multitude of people, if they had not been diſtributed by the creating hand of the Son of God.

Jeſus, notwithſtanding the ſmallneſs of the number, ordered them to be brought to him; and immediately commanded the multitude to ſit down on the graſs, with which the place abounded, directing his diſciples at the ſame time to range them in a regular order, by hundreds and fifties in a company, each company forming a long ſquare, containing an hundred in rank, and fifty in file, that the number might be more eaſily aſcertained, and the people the more regularly ſerved.

In obedience to his command, the people ſat down in the manner they were ordered, big with the expectation of what this uncommon preparation portended: while the great Maſter of the banquet ſtood ready to ſupply the neceſſities of all his gueſts; a banquet, where, though they had no canopy, but the azure ſky, no table, but the verdant turf, where their food was only coarſe barley bread, and dried fiſhes, and their drink only water from a bubbling fountain, yet diſplayed more real grandeur, by the preſence of the divine Maſter of it, than the royal feaſt of gorgeous Ahaſuerus, or the ſplendid entertainment of the imperious Nebuchadnezzar.

The multitude being ſeated, Jeſus took the loaves and fiſhes into his hands, in ſight of all the people, that they might be convinced of the ſmall quantity of proviſions that were then before

before them, and that they could only expect to be fed by his ſupernatural power. But that hand, which had conſtantly ſuſtained nature, could now eaſily multiply theſe five loaves and two fiſhes; for, as the Pſalmiſt elegantly obſerves, "He openeth his hand, and filleth all things living with plenteouſneſs." Accordingly, he looked up to heaven, returned thanks to God, the liberal giver of all good things, for his infinite beneficence in furniſhing food for all fleſh, and for the power he had conferred on him, of relieving mankind by his miracles, particularly for that he was about to work. This done, he bleſſed them, and ſo peculiarly efficacious was his bleſſing, that theſe five barley loaves and two fiſhes were multiplied into a quantity ſufficient to ſupply the wants of five thouſand men, beſides women and children, who, on the moſt favourable ſuppoſition, muſt amount to an equal number. "And Jeſus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he diſtributed to the diſciples, and the diſciples to them that were ſet down; and likewiſe of the fiſhes, as much as they would," *John* vi. 11.

Thus did the compaſſionate and powerful Redeemer feed at leaſt ten thouſand people with five barley loaves and two ſmall fiſhes, giving a magnificent proof, both of his power and goodneſs. For after all had eaten to ſatisfy, they took up twelve baſkets full of the broken pieces of meat—a much larger quantity than was at firſt ſet before our Lord to divide.

Miraculous work! But what is too hard for God! What is impoſſible to Omnipotence! Strange perverſeneſs of the ſons of men, that after ſuch manifeſtations of Almighty power, they ſhould incredulouſly doubt, or impiouſly diſtruſt, the works of the Son of God; as the extraordinary circumſtances attending them, muſt convince the moſt hardened ſinner that they were the effect of God's unlimitted power and goodneſs.

The literal account of this miracle, as recorded by the ſeveral Evangeliſts, is very plain, as well as circumſtantial; and it is remarkable, that the place and time tended to magnify its greatneſs. The place was a deſart, where there was no poſſibility of procuring any ſuſtenance. Had he done this mighty work in any of the towns or villages round about, the Phariſees in thoſe days, and the infidels in ours, might have objected, that he had received ſecretly ſome ſupplies; but this, in the preſent

ſent caſe, was impoſſible. The time was the evening; the people had been all the day faſting, and conſequently were ready for their meal; had it been done in the morning, they might have ſaid, either that the people had been juſt refreſhed, or were not hungry; conſequently the miracle not great. But the time and place wholly removed all objections of this kind, and proved, beyond a poſſibility of doubt, that "God can furniſh a table in the Wilderneſs."

We ſhould learn from this mighty miracle to remember, That it is God Almighty who every year bleſſes mankind with plentiful ſupplies of every thing neceſſary; who agreeable to the emphatical words of David, "viſiteth the earth, and bleſſeth it; who maketh it very plenteous, who watereth her furrows, and ſendeth rain into the little vallies thereof, who maketh it ſoft with ſhowers, and bleſſeth the increaſe of it: who crowneth the year with his goodneſs, while his clouds drop fatneſs: making the vallies ſtand ſo thick with corn, that they laugh and ſing."—Whoſe beneficent hand and liberal bounty call for all their praiſe, and claim all their thankfulneſs. For however inattentively we may behold this mighty work of Omnipotence, it is no leſs a miracle, that he ſhould every day ſupport and feed the whole race of mankind, and all the creatures of his hand, than that Chriſt ſhould feed five thouſand with five loaves and two fiſhes; for what proportion does five thouſand bear to thoſe myriads of men, who are daily fed from the fruits of the earth; the increaſe of which is equally a miracle with the increaſe of the bread and loaves, by the bleſſing of Jeſus.—How ſmall is the ſeed ſown when compared with the produce? It is carried out in handfuls and brought home in ſheaves: and who can tell by what ſecret operations this wonderful effect is wrought! Nature is equally wonderful in all her work, as in this particular; and the divinity, to an attentive obſerver, equally viſible in theſe regular productions, as in miraculous ſupplies afforded; equally ſeen in the wine produced from the moiſture of the earth filtrated through the branches of the vine, as in that inſtantaneouſly made from water, at the marriage in Cana: equally ſeen in the corn gradually ripened, and made into bread for the ſupport of mankind; as in the bread miraculouſly bleſſed to the ſupport of the five thouſand. But the conſtant

repetition

repetition of these surprizing operations render them common, and being common, they are less observed. Our heavenly Father, therefore, condescends to deviate from the common order of things to rouse and awaken our attention. But if we are dead and utterly inattentive to the work of God in nature, where we see the divine magnificence and bounty so visible, so richly displayed, there is too much reason to fear, that outward miracles will not now awaken us. We are, however, apt to deceive ourselves in this respect, and are often led to conclude, that had we been present at so stupendous a miracle as that we are contemplating, we should have adored the divine hand that wrought it, and never have forsaken the blessed Jesus.—But, alas! if all the displays God's divine power in the works of creation; if all the evidences of his Omnipotence, if the continual supplies of his bounty, and the most legible characters of his adorable love written upon all the creatures of his hand, will not elevate our grateful and rejoicing hearts to him, there is great reason to fear that had we seen the blessed Jesus feed five thousand men with five barley loaves and two small fishes; had we ourselves been partakers of this miraculous banquet, we should have acted like many who really enjoyed these privileges, and have turned away at some of his hard sayings, "and walked no more with him."

But to return. The people, when they had seen the Saviour of the world perform so stupendous a miracle, were astonished above measure; and, in the height of their transport, purposed to take Jesus by force, and make him a king, concluding, that he must then assume the title of the Messiah, whose coming they had so long earnestly expected, and under whose reign they expected all kinds of temporal felicities.

But our Lord, well knowing the intentions of the multitude, and the inclinations of his disciples to second them, ordered the latter to repair immediately to their boat, and sail to Bethsaida, while he sent away the former. They would, it seems, gladly have detained the people, with whom they fully agreed in sentiments; and even lingered till he constrained them to get into the boat; so fully were they still possessed, that their Master was to take the reigns of government, and become a powerful prince over the house of Jacob.

The people ſuffered the diſciples to depart, without the leaſt remorſe, as they ſaw that Jeſus did not go with them.

Perhaps they imagined he was ſending them away to provide ſuch things as they had need of in the expedition. Nor did they refuſe to diſperſe when he commanded them, purpoſing to return in the morning, as we find they actually did.

Having thus ſent the diſciples and the multitude away, Jeſus repaired himſelf to the ſummit of a mountain, ſpending the evening in heavenly contemplations and ardent prayers to his Almighty Father.

But the diſciples, meeting with a contrary wind, could not continue their courſe to Bethſaida, which lay about two leagues to the northward of the deſart mountain, where the multitudes were miraculouſly fed. They, however, did all in their power to land as near that city as poſſible, and were toſſed up and down all night by the tempeſt: ſo that at the concluſion of the fourth watch, or five o'clock in the morning, they were not above a league from the ſhore.

Their divine Maſter beheld from the mountain, the dilemma in which they were; but they were ignorant of his preſence, though he was now coming to their relief. From hence we ſhould learn, when the ſtormy billows of affliction aſſault, and ſeem ready to overwhelm us, not to deſpare of relief; for God beholds every particular of our diſtreſs, and hath not forgotten to be gracious, but will ſurely hear our diſtreſs, and work our deliverance in a manner altogether unexpected. He often calms the ſtorm of affliction that ſurrounds us, and commands the bellowing waves of diſtreſs to ſubſide. Human wiſdom, indeed, is often at a loſs; it can diſcover no hopes of deliverance, nor ſee any way to eſcape; but he can eaſily effect the one, or point out the other.

Such was the ſtate of the diſciples; they were toſſed by boiſterous waves, and oppoſed in their courſe by the rapid current of the wind, ſo that all hopes of reaching the place intended were vaniſhed; when, behold, their heavenly Maſter, to aſſiſt them in this diſtreſsful ſituation, comes to them, walking on the foaming ſurface of the ſea. Their Lord's approach, filled them with aſtoniſhment; they took him for one of the apoſtate ſpirits, and ſhrieked for fear. Their terrors were, however, ſoon removed; their great and affectionate Maſter talked to them, with the ſound of

of whoſe voice they were perfectly acquainted. "Be of good cheer (ſaid the bleſſed Jeſus) it is I, be not afraid."

Peter, a man of a warm and forward temper, beholding Jeſus walking on the ſea, was exceedingly amazed, and conceived the ſtrongeſt deſire of being enabled to perform ſo wonderful an action.

Accordingly, without the leaſt reflection, he immediately begged, that his Maſter would bid him come to him on the water. He did not doubt but that Jeſus would gratify his requeſt, as it ſufficiently intimated that he would readily undertake any thing, however difficult, at the command of his Saviour. But it appeared, that his faith was too weak to ſupport him to that height of obedience to which he would have willingly ſoared. To convince this forward diſciple of the weakneſs of his faith, and render him more diffident of his own ſtrength, our bleſſed Saviour granted Peter his requeſt. He ordered him to come to him upon the water.

Peter joyfully obeyed his divine Maſter: he left the boat, and walked on the ſurface of the ſea. But the wind increaſing, made a dreadful noiſe, and the boiſterous waves at the ſame time threatened every moment to overwhelm him. His faith now ſtaggered, his preſence of mind forſook him; he forgot that his Saviour was at his hand; and in proportion as his faith decreaſed, the waters yielded, and he ſunk. In this extremity he looked around for his Maſter; and on the very brink of being ſwallowed up, cried, "Lord ſave me!" His cry was not diſregarded by his compaſſionate Saviour; "He ſtretched forth his hand and caught him, and ſaid unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didſt thou doubt?" *Matt.* xiv. 31.

Peter was convinced, before he left the ſhip, that it was Jeſus who was coming to them on the water: nor did he even doubt it when he was ſinking, becauſe he then implored his aſſiſtance. But when he found the ſtorm increaſe, and the billows rage more horribly than before, his fears ſuggeſted, that either his maſter would be unable or unwilling to ſupport him amidſt the frightful blaſts of the tempeſt.

His fears were therefore both unreaſonable and culpable; unreaſonable, becauſe the ſame power that had enabled him to walk on the ſurface of the deep, was abundantly ſufficient to ſupport him there, notwithſtanding all the horrors of the ſtorm; culpable, becauſe he conſidered

dered his Maſter as unable to preſerve him, or that he paid no regard to his promiſe; for Jeſus had virtually promiſed him his aſſiſtance, when he granted his petition. This circumſtance ſhould teach us not to be preſumptuous and ſelf-ſufficient; nor to ruſh on danger, and fly in the face of oppoſition, unleſs there is a neceſſity for ſo doing. We ſhould never refuſe to undertake any action, however difficult, when the cauſe of Chriſt calls upon us; or abandon the paths of virtue from a fear of the reſentment of the children of this world; but we ſhould, at the ſame time, be careful not to go farther than neceſſity obliges us, leſt, like Peter, we repent our own temerity.

This miracle alarmed the diſciples, for though they had ſo very lately ſeen the miracle of the five loaves, they did not ſeem to have before formed a proper idea of his power; but being now fully convinced that he could be no other than the expected Meſſiah, they "came and worſhipped him, ſaying, of a truth, thou art the Son of God." *Matt.* xiv. 33.

Our Saviour ſeems to have confirmed this miracle, by working another; for the Evangeliſts tells us than he had no ſooner entered into the ſhip, and huſhed the horrors of the ſtorm, than they arrived at the place whither they were going.—"Then they willingly received him into the ſhip; and immediately the ſhip was at the land whither they went." *John* vi. 21.

When our Lord diſembarked, the inhabitants of the neighbouring country ran to him, bringing with them all thoſe that were ſick, and they were all healed. It muſt be remembered, that though Jeſus ordinarily reſided in the neighbourhood of Capernaum, yet he had been abſent ever ſince his viſiting Nazareth; and therefore it is natural to think, that the inhabitants, on his return, would not omit the opportunity of bringing their ſick in ſuch crouds, that it was impoſſible for Jeſus to beſtow particular attention on each of them; and this was the reaſon for their beſeeching him, "that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole." *Matt.* xiv. 36.

The virtue of that power by which he wrought theſe things, lay not in his garment, for then the ſoldiers who ſeized them at his crucifixion might have wrought the ſame miracles, but it was becauſe Jeſus willed

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it to be ſo. It was now the acceptable time, the day of ſalvation, foretold by Iſaiah, and Chriſt's volition was ſufficient to remove any diſtemper whatſoever.

It has been mentioned that our bleſſed Saviour, after miraculouſly feeding the people, ordered them to diſperſe, and retire to their places of abode.

The former command they obeyed, but inſtead of complying with the latter, they ſtayed in the neighbourhood of the deſart mountain; and obſerving that no boat had come thither, ſince the diſciples left their Maſter, they concluded that Jeſus ſtill continued in that place, and had no deſign of leaving his attendants. Hence they were perſuaded, that though Jeſus had modeſtly declined the honour of being made a king, he would accept it the next day; eſpecially as they might fancy his diſciples were diſpatched to the other ſide, with no other intention than to prepare every thing neceſſary for that purpoſe. Hopes like theſe animated them to continue in this ſolitary wilderneſs, and take up their lodgings in the caverns of the rocks and mountains, notwithſtanding their difficulties were greatly increaſed by the raging of the ſtorm.

But no ſooner did the cheering rays of light appear, than the multitude left their retreat, and ſearched for Jeſus in every part of the mountain, to the ſummit of which they had ſeen him retire. Finding their ſearch in vain, they concluded that he muſt have departed for the other ſide, in ſome boat belonging to Tiberius, which had been forced by the ſtorm to take ſhelter in a creek at the foot of the mountain. Accordingly, they repaired to Capernaum, where they found him in the ſynagogue teaching the people; and could not help aſking him with ſome ſurprize, "Rabbi, when cameſt thou hither?" *John* vi. 25.

To this queſtion our Lord replied, that they did not ſeek him becauſe they were convinced by his miracles of the truth of his miſſion, but becauſe they hoped to be continually fed in the ſame miraculous manner as before. "Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, ye ſeek me, not becauſe ye ſaw the miracles, but becauſe ye did eat the loaves and were filled." Theſe are the views which induce ye to follow me; but ye are entirely miſtaken; for happineſs does not conſiſt in the meat that periſheth, nor is it that ſort of meat ye muſt expect to receive from the Meſſiah.

Mere animal food, which pleaſe and delight the body only, are not the gifts he came down from heaven to beſtow; it is the meat that endureth to everlaſting life, divine knowledge and grace, which, by invigorating all the faculties of the ſoul, make it at once incorruptible and immortal: neither ought ye to follow the ſon of man with no other intention than to obtain the meat that periſheth; but in hopes of being rewarded with the meat that endureth to everlaſting life: "Labour not for the meat which periſheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlaſting life, which the ſon of man ſhall give unto you: for him hath God the Father ſealed." *John* vi. 27.

The Jews, who were accuſtomed to the metaphors of meat and drink, as they are frequently found in the writings of their own prophets to ſignify wiſdom and knowledge, might have eaſily underſtood what our bleſſed Saviour meant by the meat "enduring to everlaſting life." They, however, entirely miſtook him; imagining that he ſpake of ſome delicious healthful animal food, which would render them immortal, and which was only to be procured under the government of their great Meſſiah. It is therefore no wonder that his exhortation ſhould ſo greatly affect them, that they aſked him what they ſhould do to erect the Meſſiah's kingdom, and obtain that excellent meat which he ſaid God had authorized him to give to his followers.

The Jews were elated with the proſpect of the mighty empire the promiſed Meſſiah was to eſtabliſh, and, doubtleſs, expected, that Jeſus would have bidden them firſt to riſe againſt the Romans, vindicate their own liberties, and then eſtabliſh in every country, by the terror of fire and ſword, the authority of that powerful prince ſo long promiſed to the Jewiſh nation. To convince them, therefore, of their miſtake, and inform them what God really required of them, towards erecting the Meſſiah's kingdom, Jeſus told them, that they ſhould believe on the perſon ſent to them from the God of Jacob; but at this anſwer they were exceedingly offended. They were perſuaded that he could not be the Meſſiah, promiſed by the prophets, who took no care to erect a temporal kingdom. And ſome of them, more audacious than the reſt, had the confidence to tell him, that ſince he aſſumed the character of the Meſſiah, and required them to

to believe in him as ſuch, notwithſtanding his character was entirely different from the great deliverer deſcribed in the ſacred writings, it was neceſſary that he ſhould perform greater miracles than either Moſes, or any of the old prophets, if he was deſirous of convincing them that they ought to believe him the long promiſed Meſſiah. "They ſaid therefore unto him, What ſign ſheweth thou then, that we may ſee, and believe thee? What doſt thou work? Our father did eat manna in the deſart; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat." *John* vi. 30.

By extolling the miracles of the manna, by calling it bread from heaven, and by inſinuating that this miracle was wrought by Moſes, the Jews endeavoured to depreciate both Chriſt's miſſion, and his miracles of the loaves. They conſidered his miracles as a ſingle meal of terreſtrial food, at which not above nine or ten thouſand had been fed; whereas Moſes had ſupported the whole Jewiſh nation, during the ſpace of forty years in the wilderneſs, by celeſtial food. To this objection the bleſſed Jeſus replied, "Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, Moſes gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven." *John* vi. 32. Moſes did not give you the manna that fell around the camp in the wilderneſs, nor did it deſcend from heaven; it was formed in the regions of the air, by the omnipotent hand of the God of Jacob. But by the miracles of the loaves, my heavenly Father hath typified the true, the ſpiritual, the heavenly bread, which he himſelf giveth to the ſons of men, and of which the manna was only a ſymbolic repreſentation; the food that ſuſtained the Iſraelites in the wilderneſs was ſufficient only for a ſingle nation; but this for all the children of men.

Many of the Jews, who liſtened with pleaſure to his doctrine, and having heard him deſcribe the properties of the celeſtial bread, were animated with an earneſt deſire of being always fed with it. "Lord (ſaid they) evermore give us this bread." To which Jeſus anſwered, "I am the bread of life: He that cometh to me ſhall never hunger; and he that believeth on me ſhall never thirſt." *John* vi. 35

Having made this anſwer to thoſe who liſtened attentively to his doctrine, he turned himſelf to ſuch as had heard him with prejudice, and took every advantage of wreſting his words.

words. You aſk me, ſaid he, to ſhew you a ſign, that ye may ſee and believe me to be the true Meſſiah. Surely you have ſeen it: you have ſeen my character and miſſion in the many miracles I have performed; miracles abundantly ſufficient to convince you that I am really the Meſſiah ſo often promiſed by the ancient prophets, ſo long expected by the whole Jewiſh nation. But notwithſtanding all theſe proofs, your hearts are ſtill hardened; you expect a temporal prince, who ſhall raiſe the Jewiſh kingdom above all the empires of the earth: and becauſe I do not affect the authority and pomp of an earthly monarch, you reject me as an impoſtor. Your infidelity, therefore, does not proceed from want of evidence, as you vainly pretend, but from the perverſeneſs of your own diſpoſitions, which perhaps may in time be overcome; for all thoſe that the Father hath given me, however obſtinate they may be for a ſeaſon, will at laſt believe on the Son of God. Nor will I ever reject any who may at any time come to me, however low their circumſtances may be, however vile they may appear in their own eyes, or however greatly their violence againſt my doctrines may have been exerted. I came down from heaven, not to act according to the common method of human paſſions, which excite men to return evil for evil, but to bear with them; to try all poſſible means to bring them to repentance; and lead them in the ſtrait paths of virtue, which terminate at the manſions of the heavenly Canaan.

It is the fixed determination of my Father, to beſtow eternal life on all who truly believe in me: and therefore I will raiſe them up at the laſt day.

As the proſpect of the greateſt part of the Jews, extended no farther than temporal privileges and advantages, it is no wonder that they were offended at this doctrine; eſpecially at his affirming that he was the bread of life, and that he came down from heaven. Was not this man, ſaid they, born into the world like other mortals? And are we not acquainted with his parents? How then can he pretend to come down from heaven?

But theſe degrading thoughts could not eſcape the cenſure of him, to whom nothing is a ſecret; you need not, ſaid the bleſſed Jeſus, object to my birth, and the meanneſs of my relations, nor conſider them as inconſiſtent with my heavenly extraction;

tion; for while you believe your teachers, who have ſo ſhamefully corrupted the oracles of Omnipotence, and filled your minds with the vain expectations of a temporal kingdom, you cannot believe on me. No man can believe on the Son of God, unleſs he be perſuaded by the Father. You need not be ſurprized at this; for however ye imagine that all men at the appearance of the Meſſiah, will flock to him with great cheerfulneſs, and become the willing ſubjects of his kingdom, without any extraordinary means of perſuaſion, the prophets plainly foretel the contrary: for they promiſe that men ſhall enjoy the teaching of the Father, in a far more eminent manner, during the Meſſiah's kingdom, than under any preceding diſpenſation; conſequently perſuaſion, and the moſt earneſt perſuaſion too, is neceſſary. You are not to underſtand that by being taught of God, you are to ſee with your bodily eyes the inviſible Jehovah, becauſe that privilege is confined to the Son alone; but that you are to be taught by the Spirit of God whatever is requiſite for your eternal intereſt in and by me, who am the way, the truth, and the life.

Having thus aſſerted the dignity of his miſſion, and demonſtrated that it really belonged to him, the bleſſed Jeſus examined the compariſon between himſelf, conſidered as the bread from heaven, and the manna which Moſes provided for their fathers in the howling wilderneſs. The manna, ſaid he, which your fathers eat in the deſart, could not preſerve them from temporal death; but the bread which came down from heaven will render men immortal. "I am the living bread, which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he ſhall live for ever. And the bread that I will give is my fleſh, which I will give for the life of the world." *John* vi. 51.

Though the divine teacher, on this occaſion, made uſe of no other expreſſions than what the Jews had been accuſtomed to interpret in a figurative ſenſe; yet ſo great was their perverſeneſs, that they conſidered them as ſpoken literally, and were aſtoniſhed beyond meaſure at what he could mean, by ſaying he would give them "his fleſh to eat." Jeſus, however, knowing how unreaſonable his hearers were, did not think proper to explain himſelf more particularly at this time. But perſiſting in the ſame figurative manner of expreſſion, he repeated and affirmed more earneſtly what he had

before aſſerted. Except, ſaid he, ye be entirely united to me by a hearty practice and belief of my doctrine, partake of the merit of that ſacrifice which I ſhall offer for the ſins of the world, continue in the communion of my religion, and receive ſpiritual nouriſhment, by the continual participation of thoſe means of grace which I ſhall purchaſe for you by my death, ye can never enter the happy manſions of eternity. "Whoſo eateth my fleſh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raiſe him up at the laſt day. For my fleſh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." *John* vi. 54, 55.

This is the bread which came down from heaven; a kind of bread infinitely ſuperior to that of manna, both in its nature and efficacy. It is different in its nature from manna, becauſe it is not to be eaten, as your fathers did that food in the wilderneſs; they "eat manna and are dead." It is different in its effect, becauſe he that "eateth of this bread ſhall live for ever."

Theſe particulars Jeſus ſpake in the hearing of all the people, who attended the public worſhip in the ſynagogue of Capernaum; and tho' moſt of the metaphors were very eaſy to be underſtood, yet they could not comprehend what he meant, by "eating his fleſh, and drinking his blood;" a thing not only prohibited by the law of Moſes, but alſo repugnant to the cuſtoms of all civilized nations.

Many, therefore, who had followed him, conſidered it as inconſiſtent, and abſolutely abſurd. But Jeſus anſwered, Are you offended, becauſe I told you my fleſh is bread; that it came down from heaven; and that you muſt, in order to have eternal life, eat my fleſh, and drink my blood? But what if ye ſhall ſee the Son of Man aſcend up bodily into heaven, from whence he was ſent by his heavenly Father? You will then ſurely be perſuaded that I really came from heaven: and at the ſame time be convinced that you cannot eat my fleſh in a corporal manner.

I never meant that you ſhould underſtand the expreſſion literally; my fleſh, in that caſe, would be of no advantage to the children of men. The metaphor was only uſed to vindicate that you muſt believe in the doctrines which I preach; for the revealing of which, I was ſent into the world, by my heavenly Father, in form like one of you.

My doctrine may, perhaps, be ineffectual

effectual to ſome of you, becauſe ye are deſirous of perverting it, and from thence to form a pretence for forſaking me. I well know the ſecret receſſes of every heart; and therefore told you, that no man can believe on me, except it was given him of my Father.

The ſelf-ſufficient, ſelf-righteous Jews, were ſo offended at this diſcourſe, that many of them, who had hitherto been our Saviour's diſciples, went out of the ſynagogue, and never more came to hear him. They found that all their pleaſing views of worldly grandeur, and an extenſive kingdom, could have nothing more than an ideal foundation, if they acknowledged Jeſus to be the Meſſiah. But as they were unwilling to abandon all their favourite hopes of power, they refuſed to own him for the great Redeemer of Iſrael they had ſo long expected.

When the Jews were departed, Jeſus turned himſelf to his diſciples, and with a look of ineffable ſweetneſs, ſaid to them, "Will ye alſo go away?" To this Peter anſwered, "Lord, to whom ſhall we go? Thou haſt the words of eternal life! And we believe and are ſure, that thou art that Chriſt, the ſon of the living God." *John* vi. 68, 69.

Peter, in this reply, alluded to our Lord's declaration of himſelf, in which he ſays, that he was the bread of life, founding his faith in him as the Meſſiah.

But Jeſus, to convince him that he was not ignorant of the moſt ſecret thoughts of the heart, nor afraid that his enemies ſhould be companions of his moſt retired actions, told him, that one of the twelve was a wicked man, and would be guilty of the vileſt action. The prediction of Jeſus was punctually verified when Judas Iſcariot, one of the twelve choſen diſciples, baſely betrayed his great Lord and Maſter.

CHAP. XV.

Phariſaical Superſtition ſeverely reprimanded. The great Redeemer continues to diſplay his Power and Benevolence in the Relief of ſeveral Objects of Affliction. Guards his Diſciples againſt the prevailing Errors and Fallacies of the Scribes and Phariſees. Proceeds on the Works of his heavenly Father.

THE ſeaſon of the grand paſſover approaching, Jeſus went up to Jeruſalem to attend that ſolemnity. But the Jews, being offended at his diſcourſe in the ſynagogue of Capernaum, made an attempt upon his life. Our Lord, therefore, finding it impoſſible to remain at Jeruſalem

ſalem in ſafety, departed from that city, and retired into Galilee.

The Phariſees were ſenſible they could not perpetrate their malicious deſigns upon him on that occaſion; they therefore followed him, hoping to find ſomething by which they might accuſe him; and at length ventured to attack him for permitting his diſciples to eat with unwaſhed hands, becauſe, in ſo doing, they tranſgreſſed the tradition of the elders.

Moſes had, indeed, required external cleanneſs as a part of their religion; but it was only to ſignify how careful the ſervants of the Almighty ſhould be to purify themſelves from all uncleanneſs, both of fleſh and ſpirit. Theſe ceremonial inſtitutions were, in proceſs of time, prodigiouſly multiplied, and the Phariſees, who pretended to obſerve every tittle of the law, conſidered it as a notorious offence to eat bread with unwaſhed hands, though at the ſame time they ſuffered the more weighty precepts of the law to be neglected and forgotten.

To expoſe the abſurdity of ſuch ſuperſtitious cuſtoms, our Saviour applied to them the words of the prophet Iſaiah, "This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." Adding, that all their worſhip was vain, and diſpleaſing to the Almighty, while they praiſed themſelves, and impoſed upon others the frivolous precepts of man's invention, and at the ſame time neglected the eternal rules of righteouſneſs: and to remove all objections that might be brought againſt this imputation of groſs prophaneneſs in the Phariſees, he ſupported it by a very remarkable inſtance.

God, ſaid the Saviour of the world, hath commanded children to honour their parents, and to maintain them when reduced to poverty by ſickneſs, age, or misfortunes, promiſing life to ſuch as obey this precept, and threatening death to thoſe who diſregard it. But notwithſtanding the peremptory commandment of Omnipotence, you teach, that it is a more ſacred duty to enrich the temple, than to nouriſh their parents reduced to the utmoſt neceſſity, pretending that what is offered to the great Parent of the univerſe is much better beſtowed, than what is given to the ſupport of our earthly parents; making the intereſt of God abſolutely different from that of his creatures. Nay, ye teach, that it is no breach of the commandment for a man to ſuffer his parents to periſh, provided he has given, what ought to nouriſh them, to the temple of Jeruſalem.

Thus

Thus have you concealed under the cloak of piety, the moſt horrid, the moſt unnatural crime any perſon can commit.

Having thus reproved the Phariſees, he called the multitude to him, and deſired them to reflect on the abſurdity of the precepts inculcated by the Scribes. Theſe hypocrites, ſaid he, ſolicitous about trifles, neglect the great duties of morality, which are of eternal obligation. They ſhudder with horror at unwaſhed hands, but are perfectly eaſy under the guilt of a polluted conſcience, though they muſt be ſenſible that "not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man: but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." *Matt.* xv. 11.

The haughty Phariſees were highly offended at his ſpeaking in a degrading manner of their traditions. And the apoſtles, who would gladly have reconciled their Maſter and the Phariſees, inſinuated to Jeſus that he ought to have acted in another manner. To which our Saviour anſwered, "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, ſhall be rooted up." *Matt.* xv. 13. As if he had ſaid, you have not cauſe to fear their anger, as both they and their doctrine ſhall periſh together, for neither of them came from God. Adding, "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both ſhall fall into the ditch." *Matt.* xv. 14.

His diſciples, not fully comprehending this doctrine, deſired their Maſter to explain it. This our Saviour complied with, and ſhewed them that meats, being of a corporal nature, could not defile the mind of man, or render him polluted in the ſight of the Almighty, unleſs they are uſed to exceſs, or in oppoſition to the commandment of God; and even then the pollution aroſe from the man, and not from the meat. But, on the contrary, that which proceeded out of the mouth of a man comes from his heart, and really polluteth his mind.

Theſe doctrines of truth could not fail of irritating the Phariſees, as they tended to ſtrip them of the maſk with which they concealed their deformity, and rendered themſelves ſo venerable in the eyes of the vulgar; and therefore their plots were levelled againſt his reputation and life.

Jeſus, to avoid their malice, retired to the very borders of Paleſtine, to the coaſts of thoſe two celebrated Gentile cities, Tyre and Sidon, propoſing there to conceal himſelf, for

a time; but he could not be hid.—It was as impoſſible for the divine "ſon of righteouſneſs" to be concealed where he came with his healing wings, and meſſage of peace, as it is for the ſun in the firmament, when he riſeth in all his glory "as a bridegroom cometh out of his chamber, and as a giant rejoiceth to run his courſe." For a certain woman of Canaan, having heard of him, determined to implore his aſſiſtance. She was, indeed, one of the moſt abject ſort of Gentiles, a Canaanite, one of that deteſted race with which the Jews would have no dealing, nor even converſation; but notwithſtanding all theſe diſcouraging circumſtances, ſhe threw herſelf, as an humble petitioner, on the benevolent mercies of the Son of God. Strong neceſſity urged her on; grief and inſuperable diſtreſs cauſed her to be importunate. Alas! unhappy parent! her only daughter, her beloved child, had an unclean ſpirit, "was grievouſly vexed with a devil."

When her caſe was ſo urgent, and her woes ſo poignant, who can wonder that ſhe was ſo importunate, and would take no refuſal from this divine Perſon, whom, ſhe knew, was able to deliver her! Accordingly ſhe came; ſhe fell at his feet, ſhe beſought him, ſhe cried, ſaying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou ſon of David," have mercy. I plead no merits; as a worthleſs, ſuffering wretch, I intreat only the bowels of thy mercy; I intreat it, for I believe thee to be the ſon of David, the promiſed Meſſiah, the much deſired Saviour of the world; have mercy on me, for the caſe of my child and her diſtreſſes are my own; "My daughter is grievouſly vexed with a devil." *Matt.* xv. 22.

Is it not, at the firſt view, aſtoniſhing that ſuch a petitioner ſhould be rejected; and rejected by a bountiful and merciful Redeemer, who kindly invited all that were heavy laden to come to him; who promiſed never to caſt out any that would come, and whoſe buſineſs it was "to go about doing good?"

We, however, find he anſwered this woman not a word: he did not, in appearance, take the leaſt notice, either of her or her diſtreſs. But this ſilence did not intimidate her: ſhe cried, ſhe ſtill beſought, ſhe ſtill importunately preſſed her petition; ſo that the very diſciples were moved with her cries, and became her advocates. They, themſelves, though Jews, beſought their Maſter to diſmiſs

miſs this petitioner, to grant her requeſt, and to ſend her away.

But Jeſus ſoon ſilenced them, by an anſwer agreeable to their own prejudices. "I am not ſent (ſaid he) but unto the loſt ſheep of the houſe of Iſrael." To this the diſciples readily aſſented; and as they had a high opinion of the Jews prerogative, were ſo well ſatisfied with the anſwer, that we hear them pleading no more for this loſt, this miſerable Gentile.

But this ſoothed not her griefs; it was her own cauſe, and what is immediately our own concern animates us to the moſt zealous application. Somewhat encouraged that ſhe was the ſubject of diſcourſe between our Lord and his diſciples, ſhe ventured to approach the Saviour of the world, though ſhe well knew that the law actually forbad ſuch an intercourſe; yet ſhe came, ſhe worworſhipped "this ſon of David," ſhe confeſſed again his divinity, and prayed, ſaying, "Lord help me."

The compaſſionate Saviour now condeſcended to ſpeak to her, but with words ſeemingly ſufficient to have diſcouraged every farther attempt; nay, to have filled her with bitter diſlike to his perſon, though ſhe had conceived ſuch high and noble notions of his mercy and favour: "It is not meet (ſaid he) to take the children's bread, and to caſt it to dogs." *Matt.* xv. 26. It is not juſtice to deprive the Jews, who are the children of the covenant, the deſcendants of Abraham, of any part of thoſe bleſſings which I came into the world to beſtow, eſpecially to you, who are aliens and ſtrangers from the commonwealth of Iſrael.

This anſwer, though ſevere, could not ſhake her humility, nor overcome her patience; ſhe meekly anſwered, "Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their Maſter's table." *Matt.* xv. 27. Let me enjoy that kindneſs which the dogs of any family are not denied; from the plenty of miraculous cures, which thou beſtoweſt on the Jews, drop this one to me, who am a poor diſtreſſed Heathen: for they will ſuffer no greater loſs by it, than the children of a family do by the crumbs which are caſt to the dogs.

Our Lord having put the woman's faith to a very ſevere trial, and being convinced that ſhe poſſeſſed a juſt notion of his power and goodneſs, as well as of her own unworthineſs, wrought with pleaſure the cure ſhe ſolicited in behalf of her daughter; and, at the ſame time, gave her faith the praiſes it ſo juſtly deſerved.—

Oh!

"Oh! woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour." *Matt.* xv. 28.

After performing this miracle, Jesus returned to the sea of Galilee, through the region of Decapolis. In this country, a man was brought to him who was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech. Objects in distress were always treated with benevolence by the holy Jesus: but as the people now thronged about him, in expectation that he would soon establish his kingdom, he thought proper to take the man, with his relations, aside from the multitude; after which he put his fingers in his ears, and touched his tongue, that the deaf man, who could not be instructed by language, might know from whence all his benefits flowed. He then "looked up to heaven, and sighed, and said unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. And he charged them that they should tell no man." *Mark* vii. 34, 35, 36.

But notwithstanding they were enjoined to secrecy, the man, or his relations, published it in every part of the country, doubtless thinking they could not be too lavish in the praises of so great a benefactor: especially as the modesty with which he had performed the cure abundantly demonstrated that his sole view was the benefit of the human race.

This rumour gathered the multitude round him in Decapolis; for the fame of his miracles was extended to every corner of the country. He, therefore, to avoid the prodigious crowds of people, retired into a desart mountain, near the sea of Galilee. But the solitary retreats of the wilderness were unable to conceal the beneficent Saviour of mankind. They soon discovered his retreat, and brought to him from all quarters the sick, the lame, the dumb, the blind, and the maimed. The sight of so many objects in distress, so excited the compassion of the Son of God, that he graciously released them from all their complaints. Miracles like these could not fail of astonishing the spectators, especially those performed upon the dumb; for it must be remembered that he not only conferred on those the faculty of hearing, and pronouncing articulate sounds, but conveyed at once into their minds the whole language of their country; they were instantly acquainted with all the words it contained,

tained, their ſignifications, their forms, their powers, and their uſes: at the ſame time they enjoyed the habit of ſpeaking it both fluently and copiouſly. This was ſurely enough to demonſtrate to the moſt ſtupid, that ſuch works could have been effected by nothing leſs than infinite power. "The multitude wondered, when they ſaw the dumb to ſpeak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to ſee; and they glorified the God of Iſrael." *Matt.* xv. 31.

The various works performed by the bleſſed Redeemer detained the multitude in the deſart with him three days, during which time they conſumed all the proviſions they had brought into this ſolitary place. But Jeſus would not ſend them away faſting, leſt any who had followed him ſo far from their habitations ſhould faint in their return. Accordingly he again exerted his heavenly power to feed the multitude a ſecond time in the wilderneſs.

It is highly worthy of our notice, the great wiſdom of our bleſſed Saviour, in chuſing to ſpend ſo great a part of the time he executed his public miniſtry in, in the wilderneſs, and ſolitary places. He did not ſeek the applauſes of men, but the eternal ſalvation of their ſouls? and therefore often delivered his doctrines in the ſilent retreats thereof: in conſequence of which he was followed by ſuch only as had diſpoſitions adapted for profiting by his inſtructions. It could not be ſuppoſed that many of different diſpoſitions would accompany him into ſolitudes, where they were to ſuſtain the inconveniencies of hunger for ſeveral days ſucceſſively, and be at the ſame time expoſed to all the inclemencies of the weather. Thoſe only who were deſirous of inſtructions could, therefore, be expected to follow the bleſſed Jeſus into thoſe retired parts; and on thoſe, doubtleſs, his doctrine diſtilled like dew, and like the ſmall rain upon the tender herb. Happy mortals, who thus exchanged the ſhallow and frothy ſtreams of folly, for the deep and ſalutary rivers of eternal wiſdom; who left the noiſe and buſtle of covetous bigotted people, for the calm inſtructions of the Son of God; and exchanged the periſhing bread of this world for the "bread of life, the bread that came down from heaven!"

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"Oh! woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour." *Matt.* xv. 28.

After performing this miracle, Jeſus returned to the ſea of Galilee, through the region of Decapolis. In this country, a man was brought to him who was deaf, and had an impediment in his ſpeech. Objects in diſtreſs were always treated with benevolence by the holy Jeſus: but as the people now thronged about him, in expectation that he would ſoon eſtabliſh his kingdom, he thought proper to take the man, with his relations, aſide from the multitude; after which he put his fingers in his ears, and touched his tongue, that the deaf man, who could not be inſtructed by language, might know from whence all his benefits flowed. He then "looked up to heaven, and ſighed, and ſaid unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And ſtraightway his ears were opened, and the ſtring of his tongue was looſed, and he ſpake plain. And he charged them that they ſhould tell no man." *Mark* vii. 34, 35, 36.

But notwithſtanding they were enjoined to ſecrecy, the man, or his relations, publiſhed it in every part of the country, doubtleſs thinking they could not be too laviſh in the praiſes of ſo great a benefactor: eſpecially as the modeſty with which he had performed the cure abundantly demonſtrated that his ſole view was the benefit of the human race.

This rumour gathered the multitude round him in Decapolis; for the fame of his miracles was extended to every corner of the country. He, therefore, to avoid the prodigious crowds of people, retired into a deſart mountain, near the ſea of Galilee. But the ſolitary retreats of the wilderneſs were unable to conceal the beneficent Saviour of mankind. They ſoon diſcovered his retreat, and brought to him from all quarters the ſick, the lame, the dumb, the blind, and the maimed. The ſight of ſo many objects in diſtreſs, ſo excited the compaſſion of the Son of God, that he graciouſly releaſed them from all their complaints. Miracles like theſe could not fail of aſtoniſhing the ſpectators, eſpecially thoſe performed upon the dumb; for it muſt be remembered that he not only conferred on thoſe the faculty of hearing, and pronouncing articulate ſounds, but conveyed at once into their minds the whole language of their country; they were inſtantly acquainted with all the words it contained,

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heard that he had a ſecond time fed the multitude miraculouſly, was fearful that the common people would acknowledge him for the Meſſiah: and therefore determined openly and publicly to confute his pretenſions to that character.

In order to do this, they boldly demanded of him a ſign from heaven; for it muſt be remembered, that the Jews expected the Meſſiah would make his firſt public appearance in the clouds of heaven, and in a glorious manner eſtabliſh a temporal kingdom. This opinion was founded on the following prophecy of Daniel, which they underſtood literally: "I ſaw in the night viſions, and, behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, ſhould ſerve him. His dominion is an everlaſting dominion, which ſhall not paſs away; and his kingdom that which ſhall not be deſtroyed." *Daniel* vii. 13, 14.

It is therefore evident, that the Phariſees, by deſiring Jeſus to ſhew them a ſign from heaven, meant that he ſhould demonſtrate himſelf to be the Meſſiah, by coming in a viſible and miraculous manner from heaven, and wreſting with great pomp the ſceptre of David from the hands of the Romans.

If the minds of the Phariſees had been open to conviction, the proofs which Jeſus was daily giving them would have been more than ſufficient to eſtabliſh the truth of his miſſion, and demonſtrate that he was the long expected Meſſiah.

But they were not deſirous of being convinced; and to that alone, and not to want of evidence, or of capacity in themſelves, it was owing, that they refuſed to acknowledge our Saviour to be the perſon foretold by the prophets. Their diſpoſition was abſolutely incorrigible; ſo that Jeſus ſighed deeply in his ſpirit, and declared that the ſign they ſought ſhould never be given them; and that the only ſign they were to expect was that of the prophet Jonas, or the miracle of his own reſurrection: a ſign, indeed, much greater than any ſhewn by the ancient prophets; and conſequently a ſign which demonſtrated that Jeſus was far ſuperior to them all. "A wicked and adulterous generation ſeeketh after a ſign, and there ſhall no ſign be given unto it, but the ſign of the prophet Jonas." *Matt.* xvi. 4.

Having

Having thus removed the impertinent curiosity of the Pharisees, he departed with his disciples, and entered into a ship; and as they sailed, he cautioned them to beware of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees, which he termed leaven, from its pernicious influence in filling the minds of men with pride, and other irregular passions: these hypocrites chiefly insisted on the observation of frivolous traditions, but neglected the true principles of piety, and hence filled the minds of their disciples with an high opinion of their own sanctity.

But the disciples having forgotten to take bread with them, understood that he intended to caution them, against procuring it from the heathens or Samaritans. They were so stupid as not to know that their Master who had fed above ten thousand people with five loaves, was also capable of providing for them in their necessities.

On his landing at Bethsaida, they brought unto him a blind man, desiring that he would heal him: Jesus accordingly took the man by the hand, and led him out of the city, and having spit upon his eyes, and put his hands upon him, asked him if he saw aught? To which the man answered, "I see men as trees walking." A very poor expression to convey an idea of the indistinctness of his vision. Jesus then put his hands again upon him, and he was restored to sight, "and saw every man clearly." It should be remembered that the people of Bethsaida had, by their ingratitude, impenitence, and infidelity, greatly displeased the Saviour of the world: and this, perhaps, was the reason why Jesus would not perform the cure in the city, but led the man out into the adjacent plain. The people had also, for a long time, been solicitous that he would take upon himself the character of Messiah; and therefore he chose to perform this miracle without the city, to prevent their farther importunity, so incompatible with the modesty and lowliness of our dear Lord and Master.

CHAP. XVI.

The blessed Jesus delegates a special Power to Peter, one of his Disciples. Pronounces the final Judgment of the World, and is afterwards transfigured upon the Mount.

JESUS having displayed his power and goodness in restoring the man to sight, departed from Bethsaida, and retired into the territory of Cesarea Philippi, where, being desirous

deſirous of proving in ſome meaſure the faith of the apoſtles, he aſked them, ſaying, "Whom do men ſay that I, the Son of Man am?" In anſwer to this queſtion the diſciples replied, "Some ſay, that thou art John the Baptiſt; ſome Elias; and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets." *Matt.* xvi. 13.

The people in general miſtook the character of our Saviour, becauſe he did not aſſume that outward pomp and grandeur with which they ſuppoſed the Meſſiah would be adorned. Jeſus was therefore deſirous of knowing what idea his diſciples formed of his character, as they had long enjoyed the benefit of his doctrines and miracles; and accordingly aſked them, What they themſelves underſtood him to be? To this queſtion Simon Peter replied, "Thou art the Chriſt, the Son of the living God."

Our Saviour acknowledged the title; telling Peter, that God alone had revealed the ſecret to him. And in alluſion to his ſurname, Peter, which ſignifies a Rock, our Saviour promiſed that he ſhould have a principal hand in eſtabliſhing his kingdom; and that the chriſtian church ſhould be erected on his labours, as on a ſolid foundation, never to be deſtroyed. "And I ſay alſo unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church: and the gates of hell ſhall not prevail againſt it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatſoever thou ſhalt bind on earth ſhall be bound in heaven: and whatſoever thou ſhalt looſe on earth ſhall be looſed in heaven." *Matt.* xvi. 18, 19.

Having delegated this power to Peter, our Saviour ſtrictly forbad his diſciples to tell any man that he was the Meſſiah; becauſe it had been decreed in the courts of heaven, that he ſhould be rejected by the rulers of Iſrael as a falſe Chriſt, and ſuffer the pains of death. Circumſtances which could not fail of giving his followers great offence, as they did not yet underſtand the true nature of his kingdom; and therefore he thought proper to let every man form a judgment of his miſſion, from his doctrines and miracles, and not aſſume publicly the character of the Meſſiah under ſuch great diſadvantages.

The foregoing diſcourſes had doubtleſs filled the apoſtles minds with lofty imaginations, and therefore our Saviour thought proper to acquaint them with his ſufferings, in order to check any fond expectations of temporal power. Peter, however was greatly diſpleaſed

displeased to hear his Master talk of dying at Jerusalem when he had just before accepted of the title of Messiah. Accordingly, he rebuked him for the expression, which he was so bold as to think unguarded. But Jesus, turning himself about, said unto Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." *Matt.* xvi. 23.

Peter's conduct in this respect, arising from an immoderate attachment to sensual objects, our Saviour thought proper to declare publicly, that all who intended to share with him in the glory of the heavenly Canaan, must deny themselves; that is, they must be always ready to renounce every worldly pleasure, and even life itself, when the cause of religion required it: he also told them, that in this life they must expect to meet with troubles and disappointments; and that whoever intend to be his disciples, must "take up his cross daily, and follow him."

Thus did the blessed Jesus fully explain to his disciples the true nature of his kingdom; and at the same time intimated, that though they had already undergone many afflictions, yet they must expect still more, and greater, which they must sustain with equal fortitude, following their Master in the footsteps of his afflictions. This duty, however hard, was absolutely necessary; because by losing their temporal life, they would gain that which was eternal; "For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it." *Luke* ix. 24. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" *Matt.* xvi. 26.

To add to the weight of this argument, and inforce the necessity of self-denial, our Saviour particularly declared, that a day was fixed for distributing rewards and punishments to all the human race; and that he himself was appointed by the Father as universal judge; so that his enemies could not flatter themselves with the hope of escaping the punishments they deserved, nor his friends be afraid of losing their eternal reward. "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of my Father, with the holy angels." *Mark* viii. 38.

To fortify the minds of his diſciples, he informed them that he would not appear to judge the world in his low and deſpiſed condition, but magnificently arrayed in both his own and his father's glory; nor attended by twelve weak diſciples, but ſurrounded by miriads of celeſtial ſpirits, with numberleſs hoſts of mighty angels; nor ſhould his rewards be the great offices, and large poſſeſſions of a temporal kingdom, but the joys of immortality.

Let us now ruminate on the glory of the judge, and the ſolemnity of the final judgment. He ſhall come in the majeſtic ſplendor of his glorified body, pompouſly arrayed with the inacceſſible light wherein Jehovah reſides, and which darting thro' and enlightening the infinite regions of ſpace, with its ineffable brightneſs, ſhall make even the ſun to diſappear. Dreſſed in this awful manner, the great judge, attended by the whole celeſtial hoſt, will "deſcend from heaven with a ſhout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God," (1 *Theſ.* iv. 16) making heaven, earth, and hell to reſound. The dead of all countries, and all times, will hear the tremendous call. Hark! the living, filled with joy, exult at the approach of Omnipotence; or, ſeized with inexpreſſible horror, ſend up the moſt piercing cries, and are all changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye! The dead preſs forth from their graves, and follow each other in cloſe proceſſion! Behold—but, ah! nothing can behold, nothing can bear his preſence! The heavens depart like a ſcroll rolling itſelf together! Every mountain and every iſland is moved! The bond, the free, the rich, the great, captains and kings, to avoid the face of him that ſitteth on the throne, the preſence of the Lamb, ruſh beneath trembling mountains, and plunge into flaming rivers! But neither mountains nor flaming rivers will devour them, for they are raiſed immortal. Behold him then, for all muſt behold him! even his eye, whoſe unthinking hand drove his nails at Calvary; nor heaven, nor earth exiſt; ſtars and ſun are vaniſhed, leſt they ſhould darken the proceſſion! Once the crucifixion of Jeſus, and now his glory extinguiſhes the ſun! Lo! hell, with what reluctance comes forth for ſentence! Lo! two worlds to be judged, and the third an aſſiſtant ſpectator! Behold! with what beauty, with what boldneſs, with what joy, ſome ſpring forward towards the judgment ſeat.

See

See, on the other hand, how amazed, how terrified the wicked appear, with what vehemence they wiſh the extinction of their being! fain would they fly, but cannot; impelled by a force, by ſtrong neceſſity, they haſten to the place of judgment: as they advance, the ſight of the tribunal from afar ſtrikes them with new terror. They approach in the deepeſt ſilence, and gather round the throne by thouſands and thouſands. In the mean time the angels, having gathered together the elect from the uttermoſt parts of the earth, fly around the numberleſs multitudes, chanting melodious ſongs, and rejoicing that the day of general retribution is come, when vice ſhall be thrown from its high poſt of uſurpation, and virtue exalted to the pinnacle of honour; when the intricacies of Providence ſhall be unravelled, the perfections of the Almighty vindicated, the church of Chriſt purchaſed by his blood, cleared from her iniquitous members, and every thing which offendeth, baniſhed for ever.

Behold! the books are opened, ſilence proclaimed, and every individual filled with awful conſciouſneſs, that he, in particular, is obſerved by the Almighty; ſo that not one ſingle perſon can be concealed by the immenſity of the crowd. The Judge, who can be biaſſed by no bribes, ſoftened by no ſubtle inſinuations, impoſed upon no feigned excuſes, needs no evidence, but diſtinguiſhes with an unerring certainty. They ſeparate! They feel their judgment in them, and haſten to their proper places; the righteous on one hand of the throne, and the wicked on the other. Behold! how beautiful with the brightneſs of virtue, do the righteous ſtand at God's tribunal! their looks ſerene, and expreſſive of hopes full of immortality!

On the other hand, the wicked, confounded at the remembrance of their paſt lives, terrified with the bitter apprehenſions of what is to come, hang down their dejected heads, and wiſh to hide themſelves in the fathomleſs abyſs, but all in vain; there is no eſcaping nor appealing from this tribunal!

Behold! with mercy ſhining in his countenance, the King invites the righteous to take poſſeſſion of the kingdom prepared for them from the beginning of the world; but with frowns of anger, drives the wicked to puniſhment which ſhall have no end, no alleviation, no remiſſion! What horror, what deſpair muſt ſeize

theſe

theſe wretched ſouls, when they ſee deſtruction at hand, and feel the unſpeakable torment of an awakened conſcience! Now they ſeek for death, but find it not; would gladly be righteous, but it is too late!

The happy land of promiſe, formed by the hand of the Almighty, large, beautiful, and pleaſant, a proper habitation for his people, and long-expected by them as their country, now appears. Here all the righteous are aſſembled, forming one vaſt, one happy ſociety, even the kingdom, the city of God. Here Omnipotence manifeſts himſelf in a peculiar manner to his ſervants, wipes away all tears from off their faces, and adorns them with the beauties of immortality.

Here they drink a plenitude of joys from the chryſtal river, proceeding out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb, and eat of the fruit of the tree of life. Here there ſhall be no death, nor ſorrow, nor crying; neither ſhall there be any more pain.

Happy day! happy place! and happy people! Imagination faints with the fatigue of ſtretching itſelf to comprehend the vaſt, the unmeaſureable thought!

As this doctrine of Chriſt being appointed the univerſal Judge might appear incredible at that time, on account of his humiliation, he told them, that ſome who heard him ſpeak ſhould not taſte of death, till they ſaw him coming in this kingdom. "Verily I ſay unto you, There be ſome ſtanding here, which ſhall not taſte of death, till they ſee the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." *Matt.* xvi. 21.

There are ſome here preſent that ſhall not die, till they ſee a faint repreſentation of the glory in which I ſhall come at the laſt day, and an eminent example of my power inflicted on the men of this ſinful generation.

To verify which prediction, the diſciples lived to ſee their Maſter coming in his kingdom, when they were witneſſes of his transfiguration, reſurrection, and aſcenſion, and had the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit conferred upon them; lived to ſee Jeruſalem, with the Jewiſh ſtate, deſtroyed; and the goſpel propagated through the greateſt part of the then known world.

About eight days after this diſcourſe, our bleſſed Saviour being with the the multitude in the country of Ceſarea Philippi, left them in the plain, and, accompanied with Peter, James, and John, aſcended an exceeding high mountain.

In

In this ſolitude, while Jeſus was praying with theſe three diſciples, he was transfigured; his face became radiant and dazzling, for it ſhone like the ſun in its meridian clearneſs. At the ſame time his garment acquired a ſnowy whiteneſs, far beyond any thing human art could produce; a whiteneſs bright as the light, and ſweetly refulgent, but in a degree inferior to the radiance of his countenance.

Thus, as it were, for an inſtant, the Son of God, during his ſtate of humiliation, was irradiated with heavenly glories; and to heighten the grandeur and ſolemnity of the ſcene, Moſes, the great law-giver of Iſrael, and Elijah, a zealous defender of the laws, appeared in the beauties of immortality, the robes in which the inhabitants of the heavenly Canaan are adorned. The diſciples, it ſeems, did not ſee the beginning of this transfiguration; happening to fall aſleep at the time of prayer, they loſt that pleaſure, together with a great part of the converſation which theſe two prophets held with the only begotten Son of God.

They, however, underſtood that the ſubject was his meritorious ſufferings and death, by which he was to redeem the world; a ſubject that had a few days before given great offence to the diſciples, particularly to Peter. At beholding the illuſtrious ſight, the diſciples were greatly amazed; but the forwardneſs of Peter's diſpoſition prompting him to ſay ſomething, he uttered he knew not what: "Maſter (ſaid he) it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moſes, and one for Elias." *Mark* ix. 5.

This diſciple imagined that Jeſus had now aſſumed his proper dignity, that Elias was come according to Malachi's prediction, and the Meſſiah's kingdom was at length begun.

Accordingly, he thought it was neceſſary to provide ſome accommodation for his Maſter and his auguſt aſſiſtants, intending, perhaps, to bring the reſt of the diſciples with the multitude from the plain below, to behold his matchleſs glory. This he thought was much better for his Maſter than to be put to death at Jeruſalem, concerning which Jeſus had been talking with the meſſengers from heaven, and the deſign of which Peter could not comprehend.

But "while he yet ſpake, behold, a bright cloud overſhadowed them; and behold a voice out of the cloud, which ſaid, This is my beloved Son,

in whom I am well pleaſed: hear ye him." *Matt.* xvii. 5.

When the three diſciples heard the voice, which, like the roaring thunder, burſt from the cloud, and was ſuch as mortals were unaccuſtomed to hear, they fell on their faces, and continued in that poſture till Jeſus approached, raiſed them up, and diſpelled their fears, ſaying unto them, "Ariſe, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they ſaw no man, ſave Jeſus only." *Matt.* xvii. 7. 8.

Jeſus, having continued all night with his three diſciples in the mountain, returned to the plain early in the morning, charging them to conceal what they had ſeen, till after he was riſen from the dead. He well knew that the world, and even his own diſciples, were not yet able to comprehend the deſign of his transfiguration: and that if it had been publiſhed before his reſurrection, it might have appeared incredible: becauſe nothing but afflictions and perſecutions had hitherto attended him. "He was truly a man of ſorrows, and acquainted with grief."

But the doctrine of the reſurrection, to which the transfiguration alluded, was what the diſciples were utterly unable to underſtand. They had never learned that the Meſſiah was to die; far leſs that he was to be raiſed from the dead. They were, on the contrary, perſuaded, that he was to abide for ever; and that his kingdom was to have no end. They were alſo greatly ſurprized at the ſudden departure of Elias, and could not comprehend what the ſcribes meant by affirming that he muſt appear before the Meſſiah erects his empire. They, therefore, after long debating among themſelves, aſked their Maſter, "Why ſay the Scribes, that Elias muſt firſt come?" To which Jeſus anſwered, that Elias ſhould truly come firſt, according to the prediction of Malachi, "and reſtore all things;" but, at the ſame, time he aſſured them, that Elias was already come, and deſcribed the treatment he had met with from that ſtiff-necked people; giving them to underſtand that he ſpake of John the Baptiſt. "But I ſay unto you, that Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatſoever they liſted: likewiſe ſhall alſo the Son of man ſuffer of them. Then the diſciples underſtood that he ſpake unto them of John the Baptiſt." *Matt.* xvii. 12, 13.

CHAP.

CHAP. XVII.

Our Saviour relieves a Youth tortured with a dumb Spirit. Conforms cheerfully to the Custom of the Country by paying the Tribute. Reproves the Pride of his Disciples, and delivers some excellent moral Precepts.

WHEN our Lord approached the descent of the mountain, accompanied by his three disciples, he saw a great multitude surrounding the nine who continued in the plain, and the Scribes disputing with them. The people, seeing Jesus coming from the mountain, ran to him, and saluted him with particular reverence. After which Jesus asked the Scribes, what was the subject of their debate with his disciples? to which one of the multitude answered, "Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit: And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples, that they should cast him out, and they could not." *Mark* ix. 17, 18.

This answer being made by one of the multitude, and not by the Scribes to which the question was directed, indicates, that they had been disputing with the disciples on their not being able to cure this afflicted youth: perhaps their making this unsuccessful attempt had given the Scribes occasion to boast, that a devil was at length found which neither they nor their Master were able to conquer. This seems to be indicated by the manner in which our Saviour addressed himself to these arrogant rulers. "Oh faithless generation, says he, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?" Will no miracles ever be able to convince you? Must I always bear with your infidelity? You have surely seen sufficient demonstrations of my power, notwithstanding ye still discover the most criminal infidelity. After speaking in this manner to the Scribes, he turned himself to the father of the young man, and said, "bring thy son hither." But no sooner was he brought in sight of his deliverer, than the evil spirit attacked him, as it were, with double fury, "the spirit tare him, and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming." *Mark*. ix. 20.

Jesus could easily have prevented this attack; but he permitted it, that the minds of the spectators might be impressed with a more lively idea of this youth's distress. And for the same reason it was, that he asked the father, how long he had been in this deplorable condition? To which the

the afflicted parent anſwered, "Of a child. And oft-times it hath caſt him into the fire, and into the waters to deſtroy him: but if thou canſt do any thing, have compaſſion on us." *Mark* ix. 21, 22.

The inability of our Lord's diſciples to caſt out this ſpirit had greatly diſcouraged the afflicted father; and the exquiſite torture of his ſon, and the remembrance of its long continuance ſo diſpirited him, that he began to fear this poſſeſſion was even too great for the power of Jeſus himſelf, as the ſcribes had before affirmed; and therefore could not help expreſſing his doubts and fears. But Jeſus, to make him ſenſible of his miſtake, ſaid to him, "If thou canſt believe, all things are poſſible to him that believeth." On which the father cried out with tears, "Lord I believe; help thou mine unbelief." The vehement manner in which he ſpake cauſing the croud to gather from every quarter, "Jeſus rebuked the foul ſpirit; (ſaying unto him) Thou dumb and deaf ſpirit, I charge thee, Come out of him, and enter no more into him." *Mark.* ix. 25.

No ſooner was the powerful exit pronounced, than the devil, with a hideous howling, and convulſing the ſuffering patient in the moſt deplorable manner: till Jeſus, taking him by the hand, reſtored him to life, and delivered him perfectly recovered to his father.

The nine diſciples, during this whole tranſaction, remained ſilent. They were doubtleſs mortified to think that they had loſt, by ſome fault of their own, the power of working miracles, lately conferred upon them by their Maſter: and for this reaſon were afraid to ſpeak to him in the preſence of the multitude. But when they came into the houſe, they deſired Jeſus to inform them, why they failed in their attempt to heal that remarkable youth? To which Jeſus anſwered, "Becauſe of your unbelief." But to encourage them, he deſcribed the efficacy of the faith of miracles. "If ye have faith as a grain of muſtard ſeed, ye ſhall ſay unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it ſhall remove: and nothing ſhall be impoſſible unto you." *Matt.* xvii. 20. Nothing ſhall be too great for you to accompliſh, when the glory of God, and the good of the Church are concerned, provided you have a proper degree of faith; even yonder mountain, which bids defiance to the ſtorm, and ſmiles at the attacks of its mingled horrors, ſhall,

ſhall, at your command, leave its firm baſis, and remove to another place.

The expulſion of the dumb ſpirit ſeems to have aſtoniſhed the diſciples more than any other they had ſeen their Maſter perform; ſo that our Saviour found it neceſſary to moderate their high admiration of his works, by again predicting his own death, and retiring for a time into the unfrequented parts of Galilee.

But they could not comprehend how the Meſſiah, who was to abide for ever, and was come to deliver others from the ſtroke of death, ſhould himſelf fall by the hand of that univerſal deſtroyer. And becauſe he ſpake of riſing again the third day, they could not conceive the reaſon for his dying at all, and for his laying ſo ſhort a time in the chambers of the grave.

Though they were alarmed at this declaration, they remembered that he had often inculcated this doctrine, and reprimanded Peter for being unwilling to hear it.

After a ſhort tour through the deſart part of Galilee, Jeſus returned into Capernaum, the place of his general reſidence. Soon after his arrival, the tax-gatherers came to Peter, and aſked him, whether his Maſter would pay the tribute? That diſciple, it ſeems, had promiſed that Jeſus would ſatisfy their demand; but on a more mature conſideration feared to aſk him concerning his paying taxes on any pretence whatever.

Jeſus was, however, no ſtranger to what had happened, and the fear of Peter to aſk him; and therefore turned the diſcourſe to this ſubject, by ſaying unto him, "What thinkeſt thou, Simon? Of whom do the kings of the earth take cuſtom or tribute? Of their own children, or of ſtrangers? Peter ſaith unto him, of ſtrangers. Jeſus ſaith unto him, then are the children free;" inſinuating, that as he was himſelf the Son of the great King, to whom heaven, earth and ſea belong, he had no right to pay tribute to any monarch whatever, becauſe he held nothing by a derived right.

Or, if we ſuppoſe this contribution was made for the ſervice and reparation of the temple, he meant, that as he was himſelf the ſon of that Omnipotent Being to whom the tribute was paid, he could have juſtly excuſed himſelf. But the bleſſed Jeſus was always careful not to give offence; and therefore ſent Peter to the lake with a line and a hook, telling, him, that in the mouth of the firſt fiſh that came up, he ſhould find

a piece of money equal to the ſum demanded of them both. "Notwithſtanding, leſt we ſhould offend them, go thou to the ſea, and caſt an hook, and take up the fiſh that firſt cometh up; and when thou haſt opened his mouth, thou ſhalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them, for me and thee." *Matt.* xvii. 27.

Our Lord took this extraordinary method of paying the tribute money in this manner, becauſe the miracle was of ſuch a kind as could not fail to demonſtrate that he was the ſon of the great monarch worſhipped in the temple, and who rules the univerſe. In the very manner, therefore, of paying this tribute, he ſhewed Peter that he was free from all taxes; and at the ſame time gave this uſeful leſſon to his followers, that when their property is affected only in a ſmall degree, it is better to recede a little from their juſt right than to offend their brethren, or diſturb the ſtate, by obſtinately inſiſting on it.

Notwithſtanding our bleſſed Saviour had lately foretold his own ſufferings and death, and though theſe melancholy accounts had greatly afflicted the minds of his diſciples, yet their grief was of no long continuance; for within a few days they forgot the predictions of their Maſter, and diſputed with each other about the chief poſts of honour and profit in the Meſſiah's kingdom. This debate was over heard by the bleſſed Jeſus, though he did not mention it till after the tax gatherers were retired, when he aſked them, what they were diſputing about on the way? This queſtion rendered them all ſilent. They were fearful of diſcovering the cauſe that had given riſe to the debate, as they knew it would draw on them a reprimand from their Maſter. Jeſus, perceiving that they ſtill continued ſilent, ſat down, and ordered them all to ſtand round him, and attend to what he was going to deliver. If any man, ſaid the Saviour of the world, is ambitious of being the greateſt perſon in my kingdom, let him endeavour to obtain that dignity by preferring others in honour, and doing to them all the good offices in his power. "If any man deſire to be firſt, the ſame ſhall be laſt of all, and ſervant of all." *Mark.* ix. 35.

The diſciples were now convinced, that it was in vain to conceal the ſubject of the debate that had happened on the way; and accordingly they drew near to their Maſter, deſiring him

him to decide a point which had often given occaſion to diſputes: "Who, (ſaid they) is the greateſt in the kingdom of heaven?" *Matt.* xviii. 1. Jeſus, to check theſe fooliſh emulations in his diſciples, called a little child unto him, and placed him in the midſt, that they might conſider him attentively: and ſaid unto them, "Verily I ſay unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye ſhall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." *Matt.* xviii. 3. Unleſs ye be humbled by the power of divine grace, and brought to a due ſenſe of the vanity of all earthly preferments, riches and honours, and become meek and humble in ſpirit, ye ſhall be ſo far from becoming the greateſt in my kingdom, that ye ſhall never enter its borders. But whoſoever ſhall be ſatisfied with the ſtation in which God has placed him, receive with meekneſs all the divine inſtructions, however contrary to his own inclinations, and prefer others to himſelf, that man is really the greateſt in my kingdom. "Whoſoever therefore ſhall humble himſelf, as this little child, the ſame is greateſt in the kingdom of heaven." *Matt.* xviii. 4.

Our Saviour, to demonſtrate how truely acceptable the beauty of the grace of humility is to the Almighty, took the child in his arms, declaring, that whoever humbled themſelves, like a little child, and ſhewed kindneſs to their fellow-creatures, ſhould have the ſame kindneſs ſhewed them in the great day of account, eſpecially if they performed theſe worthy actions, in obedience to his commands.

It appears, from circumſtances, that James and John, the ſons of Zebedee, were principally concerned in this debate; for we find that John endeavoured to divert it, by telling his Maſter, they had ſeen one caſting out devils in his name, and had forbidden him, becauſe he did not join himſelf to their company. To which Jeſus replied, that they ſhould not have forbidden him, ſince he muſt have entertained very high notions of their Maſter's power, at ſeeing the devils leave the bodies of them, on mentioning the name of Jeſus. "Forbid him not; for there is no man which ſhall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly ſpeak evil of me." *Mark.* ix. 39.

You ſhould, added the bleſſed Jeſus, conſider that every one who does not perſecute us our friend; and that the ejection of devils in my name will advance my reputation, and

and promote my intereſt, even though the exorciſt, and the devils themſelves, ſhould deſign the contrary. He alſo told his diſciples that the leaſt degree of reſpect ſhewed him by any one, even though it ſhould be no more than the giving a cup of cold water to his thirſty diſciples, is acceptable to him, and ſhould not fail of meeting with an adequate reward. "For whoſoever ſhall give you a cup of water to drink, in my name, becauſe ye belong to Chriſt, verily I ſay unto you, he ſhall not loſe his reward." *Mark* ix. 41.

But on the other hand, the leaſt diſcouragement given to his diſciples in the propagation of the goſpel, come from what quarter it will, ſhall be puniſhed with the greateſt ſeverity. "And whoſoever ſhall offend one of theſe little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a mill-ſtone were hanged about his neck, and he were caſt into the ſea. *Mark.* ix. 42.

From this ſaying, Jeſus inferred, that it was more advantageous to deny ourſelves the higheſt enjoyments of this world, and to part with every thing, however precious, repreſented by an hand, a foot, or an eye, than by theſe to cauſe the weakeſt of his friends to ſtumble. And as the diſciples were appointed to ſow the ſeeds of virtue and religion in the world, or, according to the metaphor, to ſalt the people for an offering to heaven, in alluſion to ſacrifices being ſalted at the temple, Jeſus exhorted them to mortify themſelves, that they might appear worthy of ſo high an office as that of ſalting mankind for the altar of heaven; for as they were to be the ſalt of the earth, it was requiſite they ſhould themſelves be filled with the ſpiritual ſalt of all the graces, and particularly the holy ſalt of love and peace, that they might, as far as poſſible, be free from the rottenneſs of ambition, pride, contention, and every evil work.

Pride is the ſource of numberleſs ſins; and therefore the bleſſed Jeſus cautioned his diſciples, in the moſt ſolemn manner, to beware of that vice; aſſuring them, the meaneſt perſon is an object of the care of Providence; and "that their angels do always behold the face of my heavenly father." Our bleſſed Saviour did not mean by this expreſſion, that every man who practiſes the duties of religion has a particular guardian angel aſſigned him; but as all angels are ſent as miniſtering ſpirits, they may be called his angels.

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To ſhew the concern of his Almighty Father for the leaſt of his reaſonable creatures, and the great value he ſets upon the ſouls of the human race, our Saviour told them, that he not only gave his higheſt angels charge concerning them, but had alſo ſent his only begotten Son, to ſeek and to ſave that which was loſt; and would ſhare in the joy which the heavenly beings are filled with on their recovery. "How think ye? if a man have an hundred ſheep, and one of them be gone aſtray, doeth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and ſeeketh that which is gone aſtray? And if ſo be that he find it, Verily I ſay unto you, he rejoiceth more of that ſheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not aſtray. Even ſo it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of theſe little ones ſhould periſh." *Matt.* xviii. 12, 13, 14.

Having thus addreſſed the offending party, he turned himſelf towards his diſciples, and gave them inſtructions with regard to the offended. "If thy brother ſhall treſpaſs againſt thee, Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he ſhall hear thee, thou haſt gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witneſſes every word may be eſtabliſhed. And if he ſhall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man, and a publican." *Matt.* xviii. 15, 16 17.

Try every poſſible meaſure to reclaim thy brother, and in order to effect this, repreſent his fault to him privately. If this rebuke have the deſired effect, thou haſt brought him back to the paths which lead to happineſs: but, if this gentle method fail, two or more grave perſons ſhould join in the rebuke, that he may be convinced of the injury he has done thee. If he ſtill remain obſtinate, tell his offence to the church, whoſe ſentence will ſufficiently ſhew that thou haſt done thy duty, and that he alone is to blame. But if he is ſo hardened as not to be affected by the cenſure of the church, he is from thenceforth to be treated as the Phariſees treat the Heathens and Publicans; namely, as an incorrigible ſinner, whoſe company and converſation being contagious, ought to be ſhunned by all who have any love for virtue and religion.

Our Saviour now confers the ſpe-

cial power which he confined to Peter on all his diſciples. "Verily I ſay unto you, Whatſoever ye ſhall bind on earth, ſhall be bound in heaven: and whatſoever ye ſhall looſe on earth, ſhall be looſed in heaven." *Matt.* xviii. 18. That is, ye have free power to preach remiſſion of ſin through faith in the goſpel, and repentance unto life, and ſuch decree will remain valid in the court of heaven, though paſſed here below.

But, on the other hand, if the offending brother continue impenitent after all the methods above deſcribed are tried, his guilt is bound the faſter upon him; becauſe, by the precepts of the goſpel, none but penitents can obtain pardon.

Our bleſſed Saviour alſo added, as an encouragement to good men, that if they continued earneſt in their endeavour to bring ſinners to repentance, and offered up their prayers to the Almighty for aſſiſtance, he would always grant their petitions, provided they were agreeable to the wiſe ends of his providence. "Again, I ſay unto you, that if two of you ſhall agree on earth as touching any thing that they ſhall aſk, it ſhall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midſt of them." *Matt.* xviii. 19, 20.

Peter had before heard his Maſter ſpeak of the doctrine of frequent forgiveneſs, and imagined that what he had now ſo ſtrongly inculcated might prove dangerous to ſociety; and therefore thought it his duty to offer his objections. "Lord (ſaid he) how oft ſhall my brother ſin againſt me, and I forgive him? till ſeven times?" *Matt.* xviii. 21. He thought it a ſtrange doctrine which obliged him to forgive offences ſeven times repeated; but our bleſſed Saviour told him that he was very greatly miſtaken: that he never intended to limit forgiveneſs to ſeven times, but that it ought to be extended even to ſeventy times ſeven.

This excellent moral precept he enforced by the parable of the two ſervants, debtors to one lord; in order to ſhew the neceſſity of forgiving the greateſt injuries in every caſe where the offending party is ſenſible of his fault, and promiſes amendment; becauſe, on this condition alone, our heavenly Father will forgive our offences. "Therefore (ſaid the bleſſed Jeſus) is the kingdom of heaven likened to a certain king, that would take account of his ſervants." God is the great king and ſovereign

ſovereign of all creatures, and all are accountable to him, as ſervants to a Maſter. He will reckon with all: and happy are they who live ſenſible of this important truth. When he had begun to reckon, one ſervant was brought unto him who owed him an immenſe debt, ten thouſand talents, a debt much greater than he was able to pay. His lord, therefore, commanded him, agreeable to the cuſtom of thoſe times, to be ſold for a ſlave, and "his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made."

The ſervant, convinced of the juſtice of the ſentence, and knowing he had nothing to hope for, but from the mercy and clemency of his lord, fell down in the moſt humble manner, and importunately beſought him, ſaying, "Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." The Maſter, moved with compaſſion towards him, accepted of his humiliation: and to make his happineſs complete, looſed him from the ſentence inflicted, and freely forgave him the enormous debt: an obligation ſurely ſufficient to have melted the hardeſt heart into gratitude towards his Lord, and the tendereſt ſympathy towards any of his brethren in diſtreſs. But, alas! who is acquainted with the human heart? This very ſervant went out from the preſence of his compaſſionate lord, and found one of his fellow-ſervants who owed him an hundred pence: a poor, inconſiderable debt, in compariſon of what he himſelf owed his lord.

But behold the baſe inhumanity of this ſervant: he laid hands on the poor debtor, ſeizing him violently by the throat, and ſaying, "Pay me that thou oweſt." His fellow-ſervant fell down at his feet, even as he had juſt before done at the feet of his lord, and beſought him, in the very ſame words he himſelf had ſo lately uſed, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." Such a ſimilarity of circumſtances one would have thought muſt have effected his ſtony heart, brought to remembrance his own late diſtreſs, and melted his ſoul into the like generous compaſſion which had flowed ſo ſweetly from his lord to him. But his conduct was the very reverſe: he would have no patience, he would ſhew no pity: he went and caſt the unhappy debtor into priſon till he ſhould pay the debt.

His fellow-ſervants, when they ſaw what was done, were exceedingly afflicted, and came and told their lord the whole tranſaction. Upon which he ſummoned the unmerciful ſervant

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to appear before him: and filled with indignation and abhorrence, ſaid unto him, O thou wicked ſervant, how perverſe is thy behaviour, how ungrateful and baſe thy proceeding; "I forgave thee all thy debt," that enormous debt thou oweſt me, "becauſe thou deſiredſt me:" I was moved to clemency and compaſſion by thy intreaties and diſtreſs, and "ſhould not thou alſo have had compaſſion on thy fellow-ſervant, even as I had pity on thee?" Shouldſt not thou much rather have forgiven him, who was thy fellow-ſervant, and owed thee ſo ſmall a ſum, when I, thy king and lord, had forgiven thee ſo immenſe a debt?

Having thus expoſtulated with him, his wrath was kindled, and he "delivered him to the tormentors, till he ſhould pay all that was due to him. So likewiſe (added the Son of God) ſhall my heavenly Father do alſo unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their treſpaſſes." *Matt.* xviii. 34. 35. And ſurely this awful threatening ought to ſtrike the minds of fierce and implacable men with terror. For whatever they may think, it will certainly, in its full extent, be inflicted upon all who refuſe to obey the dictates of divine mercy, and forgive not only their fellow-ſervants, but every brother in Chriſt, who through weakneſs or inadvertence, may have done them an injury either in perſon or property.

CHAP. XVIII.

Our Lord attends for the fourth Time the Celebration of the Paſſover at Jeruſalem. Harangues the Multitude at the ſolemn Feaſt of Tabernacles. Exempts the Woman detected in Adultery from the Puniſhment annexed by the Jews to that Crime. Eſcapes from the Snares laid for him by the inveterate Scribes and Phariſees.

THE great Redeemer having promoted his Father's work in Galilee, departed into Judea, paſſing through the country beyond Jordan, that the Jews who inhabited theſe diſtant parts might enjoy the unſpeakable benefits of his diſcourſes and miracles. After ſowing the ſeeds of eternal life, and publiſhing the glad tidings of ſalvation in thoſe remote countries, he repaired to Jeruſalem to celebrate the fourth paſſover; but the malignity of the Scribes and Phariſees was ſo great, that he ſtayed but a ſhort time in the capital; then returned into Galilee, where the multitude again reſorted to him, and he again inſtructed them in the paths that lead to everlaſting life.

The

The feaſt of the tabernacles now drew on, at which all the males of the Jewiſh nation, capable of travelling, repaired to Jeruſalem, and dwelt in the tabernacles or booths made of the boughs of trees, in commemoration of their fathers having had no other habitation, during their forty years ſojourning in the wilderneſs. To this feaſt ſome of the kinſmen of the bleſſed Jeſus deſired he would accompany them, and there ſhew himſelf openly to the whole nation of the Jews. They did not themſelves believe that he was the great prophet ſo long expected: and therefore condemned the method he purſued in his public miniſtry as altogether abſurd.

They could not conceive what reaſons he had for ſpending ſo much of his time in the deſarts, and remote corners of the kingdom, while he pretended to ſo public a character as that of the Redeemer of Iſrael. Jeruſalem, the ſeat of power, was, in their opinion, much the propereſt place for him to deliver his doctrines, and work his miracles in the moſt public manner poſſible, before the great and learned men of the nation, whoſe deciſion in his favour would have great weight in increaſing the number of his diſciples, and inducing the whole nation to own him for the Meſſiah. "Depart hence, and go into Judea, that thy diſciples alſo may ſee the works that thou doeſt. For there is no man that doth any thing in ſecret, and he himſelf ſeeketh to be known openly: If thou do theſe things, ſhew thyſelf to the world. For neither did his brethren believe in him." *John* vii. 3, 4, 5.

Our Lord well knew the rancorous prejudice of the inhabitants of Jeruſalem; and therefore did not think proper to reſide among them any longer than was abſolutely neceſſary. They had more than once attempted his life, and therefore very little hopes remained that they would believe his miracles, or embrace his doctrine; but on the contrary, the greateſt reaſon to think they would deſtroy him, if poſſible, before he had finiſhed the work which he came into the world to perform. "My time (ſaid our Saviour to theſe unbelieving relations) is not yet come; but your time is alway ready. The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, becauſe I teſtify of it, that the works thereof are evil. Go ye up unto this feaſt: I go not up yet unto this feaſt, for my time is not yet full come." *John* vii. 6, 7, 8. As if he had ſaid, it is not proper for me to go before

the feaſt begins; but you may retire to the capital whenever you pleaſe: the Jews are your friends, you have done nothing to diſpleaſe them; but the purity of the doctrines I have preached to them, and the freedom with which I have reproved their hypocriſy, and other enormous crimes, have provoked their malice to the utmoſt height; and therefore as the time of my ſufferings is not yet come, it is not prudent for me to go ſo ſoon to Jeruſalem.

There was alſo another reaſon why our bleſſed Saviour refuſed to accompany theſe relations to the feaſt of tabernacles; the roads were crowded with people, and theſe gathering round him, and accompanying him to Jeruſalem, would doubtleſs have given freſh offence to his enemies, and in a great meaſure have prevented his miracles and doctrines from having the deſired effect. He therefore choſe to continue in Galilee, till the crowd were all gone up to Jeruſalem, when he followed, as it were in ſecret, neither preaching nor working miracles by the way; ſo that no crowd attended him to the feaſt.

As Jeſus did not go up openly to Jeruſalem, ſo neither did he, on his arrival, repair to the temple, and there preach openly to the people. This gave occaſion to ſeveral diſputes among the Jews with regard to his character. Some affirmed that he was a true prophet; and that his abſenting himſelf from the feaſt could be owing only to accident: while others as confidently aſſerted, that he only deceived the people, and paid no regard to the inſtitutions they had received from heaven.

But about the middle of the feaſt, Jeſus appeared openly in the temple, and taught the people, delivering his doctrines with ſuch ſtrength of reaſon and elegance of expreſſion, that his very enemies were aſtoniſhed, knowing that he had never enjoyed the advantage of a learned education. "Now about the midſt of the feaſt, Jeſus went up into the temple, and taught. And the Jews marvelled, ſaying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" *John* vii. 14, 15.

To which the great Redeemer of mankind replied, my doctrine was not produced by human wiſdom; the ſages of the world were not my inſtructors; I received it from heaven, it is the doctrine of the Almighty, whoſe meſſenger I am. "My doctrine

trine is not mine, but his that ſent me." *John* vii 16.

Nor can he who is deſirous of practiſing the doctrines I deliver, if he will lay aſide his prejudices, and ſincerely deſire to be taught of God, be at a loſs to know from whom my doctrines are derived: becauſe he will eaſy diſcern whether they are conformable to the will of man, or of God. It is no difficulty to diſcover an impoſtor, becauſe all his precepts will tend to advance his own intereſt, and gratify his pride. Whereas all the doctrines delivered by a true prophet have no other end than the glory of God, however contrary they may prove to himſelf. "He that ſpeaketh of himſelf, ſeeketh his own glory; but he that ſeeketh his glory that ſent him, the ſame is true, and no unrighteouſneſs is in him." *John* vii. 18.

Our Lord was upbraided with impiety by ſome of the Jews, becauſe he had healed on the Sabbath the impotent man in one of the porches of Bethesda, which they pretended was a violation of the law of Moſes, and conſequently what no prophet would be guilty of. In anſwer to which, our Saviour told them, that however they might pretend to reverence the authority of Moſes and his law, they made no ſcruple of violating the moſt ſacred of his precepts: they had reſolved to put him to death, directly contrary to every law of God and man; and in order to execute their deteſtable ſcheme, were laying plots againſt his life.

The people replied, "Thou haſt a devil, who goeth about to kill thee." To which Jeſus anſwered, I have done a miracle of an extraordinary kind on the Sabbath-day, which you think inconſiſtent with the character of a pious man; and therefore, wonder how I could perform it. But ſurely, Moſes gave you the law of circumciſion, and you make no ſcruple of performing that ceremony on the Sabbath-day, becauſe it is a precept both of Moſes and the fathers. Since, therefore, ye think yourſelves bound to diſpenſe with the ſtrict obſervance of the ſabbath, in order to form a ceremonial precept; can you be angry with me, becauſe, in order to fulfil the great end of all the divine law, I have cured a man who was infirm in all his members, and even with far leſs bodily labour than you perform the ceremony of circumciſion? Conſider, therefore, the nature of the thing; diveſt yourſelves of your prejudices, and the ſuperſtitious opinions taught by your elders,

ders, and judge impartially. "Moſes therefore gave unto you circumciſion, (not becauſe it is of Moſes, but of the fathers) and ye on the ſabbath-day circumciſe a man. If a man on the ſabbath-day receive circumciſion, that the law of Moſes ſhould not be broken; are ye angry at me becauſe I have made a man every whit whole on the ſabbath-day? Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." *John* vii. 22, 23, 24.

Notwithſtanding the ſtrength of this argument, ſeveral of our bleſſed Saviour's inveterate enemies aſked, with ſarcaſtical ſurpriſe, if the boldneſs of Jeſus, and the ſilence of the rulers, proceeded from their being convinced that he was the Meſſiah, and at the ſame time, to deride his pretenſions to that high character, ſaid, that they were acquainted both with his parents and relations: but that no man, when Chriſt appeared, would be able to tell from whence he came, founding their opinion on theſe words of the prophet Iſaiah, "Who ſhall declare his generation?" *Iſaiah* liii. 8. To which the bleſſed Jeſus anſwered, that their knowing his parents and relations was no reaſon againſt his having the prophetical characters of the Meſſiah. Adding, I am not come of myſelf, but ſent from heaven by God, who has uttered nothing by his ſervants the prophets concerning the Meſſiah, but what is true, and will all be fulfilled in me: but ye are totally ignorant of his gracious perfections, and gracious counſels, and have no inclination to obey his juſt commands. You are really ignorant of what the prophets have delivered concerning the Meſſiah; for, had you underſtood their predictions, you would have known, that one of his principal characters is to underſtand the perfections and will of God more fully, and explain them to the ſons of men more clearly than any other meſſenger ever before ſent from the Moſt High. And would you attentively conſider the doctrines I deliver, you would ſoon perceive this character remarkably fulfilled in me, and be convinced that I came from the Almighty God of Jacob.

This defence, however powerful, and his reaſons, however ſolid, were far from diſarming his enemies of their malice: for ſome of them were deſirous of apprehending him: but providence would not ſuffer any to lay hands on him, becauſe the time of his ſufferings was not yet come. Many of the people, however, convinced by the powerful miracle he had

had lately wrought, and the unanſwerable reaſons he had advanced in ſupport of his character, believed on him, and affirmed publicly in the temple, that he was the Meſſiah. "And many of the people believed on him, and ſaid, When Chriſt cometh, will he do more miracles than theſe which this man hath done?" *John* vii. 31.

The Scribes and Phariſees were highly provoked at this attachment of the common people to Jeſus; and accordingly, on the laſt and great day of the feaſt, they met in council, and ſent ſeveral officers to apprehend him, and bring him before them. Jeſus, during theſe tranſactions in the council, continued in the temple teaching the people. My miniſtry, ſaid he to the multitude, is drawing near its period; and therefore you ſhould, during the ſhort time it has to laſt, be very careful to improve every opportunity of hearing the word: you ſhould liſten with the greateſt attention to every diſcourſe, that your minds may be ſtored with the truths of the Almighty, before I return to my Father; for after my departure, you ſhall earneſtly wiſh for the ſame opportunities of ſeeing me, and hearing my inſtructions, but ſhall never obtain them. "Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that ſent me. Ye ſhall ſeek me, and ſhall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come." *John* vii. 33, 34.

The Jews, who did not underſtand that our bleſſed Saviour alluded to his own death, reſurrection, and aſcenſion to the right hand of the Majeſty on high, whither their ſins would not permit them to follow him, wondered at this doctrine, and imagined, that he intended to leave Judea, and preach to their brethren diſperſed among the Gentiles. But this ſuppoſition was not ſufficient: becauſe, if he did go and preach among the Gentiles, they thought it was not impoſſible for them to follow him thither. "Then ſaid the Jews among themſelves, Whither will he go, that we ſhall not find him? Will he go unto the diſperſed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles? What manner of ſaying is this that he ſaid, Ye ſhall ſeek me, and ſhall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come." *John* vii. 35, 36.

While the divine teacher was thus inſtructing the people in the temple, the water from Siloam was brought into the temple, according to the appointment of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, part of which they

drank with loud acclamations, in commemoration of the mercy ſhewed to their fathers, who were relieved by a ſtream which miraculouſly flowed from a rock, and relieved a whole nation, then ready to periſh with thirſt in an arid and ſandy waſte; and the other part they poured out as a drink-offering to the Almighty, accompanying it with their prayers, for the former or latter rain to fall in its ſeaſon; the whole congregation ſinging the following paſſage, "With joy ſhall ye draw water out of the wells of ſalvation." *Iſaiah* xii. 3.

It was the cuſtom of our Saviour, to deliver moral inſtructions, in alluſion to any occurrences that happened; and he accordingly took this opportunity of inviting, in the moſt affectionate manner, all who were deſirous of knowledge or happineſs, to come to him and drink, alluding to the ceremony they were then performing. And to encourage all ſuch as were deſirous of believing in him, he promiſed them the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which he repreſented under the ſimilitude of a river flowing out of their belly. "In the laſt day, that great day of the feaſt, Jeſus ſtood and cried, ſaying, If any man thirſt, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the ſcripture hath ſaid, out of his belly ſhall flow rivers of living water." *John* vii. 37, 38.

During this diſcourſe to the people, the officers from the council came to apprehend him; but hearing that the topic he was diſcuſſing was a very ſingular one, and he ſeemed to deliver his diſcourſe with remarkable fervour, their curioſity induced them to liſten ſome time to his diſcourſe before they laid hands on him. But the eloquent manner in which he delivered his ſubject melted away their rage; the ſweetneſs of his pronunciation, and the plainneſs and perſpicuity of his diſcourſe elucidated the beauties of truth, and cauſed them to ſhine before the underſtanding, with their native luſtre. Accordingly his very enemies, who were come from the council on purpoſe to apprehend him, were aſtoniſhed; the greatneſs of the ſubject, made as it were viſible by the divine ſpeaker, filled their underſtandings: the warmth and tenderneſs with which he delivered himſelf, penetrated their hearts; they felt new emotions, and being overwhelmed with the greatneſs of their admiration, were fixed in ſilence and aſtoniſhment; they condemned themſelves for having undertaken the office, and ſoon returned

turned to the rulers of Iſrael without performing it.

If our Lord had pleaded for his life before the officers of the council who were ſent to apprehend him, the ſucceſs of his eloquence, even in that caſe, had been truly wonderful: but in the caſe before us, it was ſurely ſuperior to all praiſe: for in a diſcourſe addreſſed to others, and even on a ſpiritual ſubject, it diſarmed a band of inveterate enemies, and made them his friends.

Nor were the officers the only perſons alarmed by this diſcourſe, for many of them declared that he muſt be one of the old prophets; and others, that he was no other than the Meſſiah himſelf. Some, however, led away with the common miſtake that he was born at Nazareth, aſked with diſdain, if the Meſſiah was to come out of Galilee? And whether they would acknowledge a Galilean for the Meſſiah, when the ſcripture had abſolutely declared, that he was to be born in Bethlehem, the native town of his father David? "Many of the people, therefore, when they heard this ſaying, ſaid, Of a truth this is the prophet. Others ſaid, this is the Chriſt. But ſome ſaid, Shall Chriſt come out of Galilee? Hath not the ſcripture ſaid, That Chriſt cometh of the ſeed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" *John* vii. 40, 41, 42.

Such were the diſſentions on this ſubject, that ſome of his enemies, knowing that the officers were ſent to apprehend him, threatened to lay hands on him; but the Almighty would not ſuffer them to execute their wicked deſign. "And ſome of them would have taken him; but no man laid hands on him." *John* vii. 44.

The officers now returned to the council, and were aſked, why they had not brought Jeſus of Nazareth? When the officers anſwered, "Never man ſpake like this man." This reply enraged the council, who reviled them for preſuming to entertain a favourable opinion of one whom they had pronounced an impoſtor. It is ſtrange, ſaid they, that you, who are not ignorant of our ſentiments concerning this perſon, ſhould entertain a favourable idea of him. Have any perſons of rank, or celebrated for their knowledge of the laws, believed on him? Are not his followers the very dregs of the people, who are totally ignorant of all the prophecies concerning the Meſſiah?

The officers made no anſwer to theſe railing accuſations of their Maſ-

ters;

ters; but Nicodemus, a member of the council, arraigned their conduct in a very poignant manner. "Does our law (says he) condemn any man before he has been heard?" They had before condemned their officers for being ignorant of the law, when it appeared they were themselves far more ignorant in pretending to condemn a person before they had proved him guilty. They were acting directly contrary to the fundamental principles of the law of equity, at the time they boasted of their profound knowledge of its precepts.

Incensed at this reprimand of Nicodemus, they asked him, with an air of disdain and surprise, if he was also one of those mean persons who had joined together to support the pretences of a Galilean; though the scriptures had plainly said, that Bethlehem was the place of the Messiah's nativity: Adding, that if he refused to listen to them, he should soon be convinced that the great prophet mentioned by Moses was not to be born in Galilee. "Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." *John* vii. 52.

Having made this reply to Nicodemus, the council broke up, and Jesus, who well knew their malicious intentions, retired to the mount of Olives, where he spent the night with his disciples.

Our blessed Lord, early the following morning, returned to the temple, and again taught the people. The Scribes and Pharisees now determined to render him odious to the multitude, or obnoxious to the Roman governor; and therefore placed before him a woman that had been taken in the act of adultery, desiring his opinion what punishment she ought to suffer. "This woman (said they to Jesus) was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned; but what sayest thou?" *John* viii. 4, 5.

Had our Lord disapproved the sentence of the law, they would doubtless have represented him to the multitude as a person who contradicted Moses, and favoured adultery; which could not have failed of rendering him odious to the people. On the other hand, had he ordered her to be stoned, it would have afforded a plausible pretence for accusing him to the Roman governor, as a person who stirred up the people to rebellion, the Romans having now taken the power of life and death into their own hands.

But

But Jeſus, who well knew their malicious intentions, made them no anſwer, but "ſtooped down and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not."

They, however, ſtill continued preſſing him to give an anſwer, and, at laſt, Jeſus, in alluſion to the law, which ordered that the hands of the witneſſes, by whoſe teſtimony an adulterer was convicted, ſhould be firſt upon him, ſaid, "He that is without ſin among you, let him firſt caſt a ſtone at her." Let thoſe who are remarkably zealous for having juſtice executed upon others, at leaſt, take care to purify themſelves from all heinous crimes.

This reply had its deſired effect. The hypocritical Scribes and Phariſees were convicted of ſin by their own conſciences: ſo that they immediately retired, fearing Jeſus would have made their particular ſins public. "And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conſcience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldeſt, even unto the laſt." *John* viii. 9.

The woman's accuſers being all retired, Jeſus told her, that as no man had pronounced ſentence of death upon her, neither would he pronounce it: but adviſed her to be very careful for the future to avoid the temptations which had induced her to commit ſo black a crime.

The wiſdom, knowledge, and power of our bleſſed Saviour, were eminently diſplayed on this occaſion: his wiſdom in defending himſelf againſt the malicious attempts of his enemies; his knowledge in diſcovering the ſecrets of their hearts; and his power, in making uſe of their own conſciences to render their artful intentions abortive. It was, therefore, with remarkable propriety that the great Redeemer of mankind now called himſelf the "light of the world:" as if he had ſaid, I am the ſpiritual ſun, that diſpels the darkneſs of ignorance and ſuperſtition, in which the minds of men are immerſed, and enlightens the paths that lead to eternal life: nor ſhall any who follow me ever be involved in darkneſs. "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me ſhall not walk in darkneſs, but ſhall have the light of life." *John* viii. 12.

The aſſertion of our Lord highly provoked the Phariſees, who told him he muſt be a deceiver, becauſe he boaſted of himſelf. To which the great Redeemer of mankind replied, You are not to imagine that I called myſelf the light of the world from a

principle of pride and falſhood: that title juſtly belongs to me: nor would you yourſelve srefuſe to acknowledge it, did you know from what authority I received my commiſſion, and to whom, when I have executed it, I muſt return. But theſe things ye are totally ignorant of; and therefore judge according to outward appearances, and condemn me becauſe I do not deſtroy thoſe who oppoſe my authority. But the deſign of the Meſſiah's coming is very different from your miſtaken notions; he is not to deſtroy, but to ſave the children of men. "Though I bear record of myſelf, yet my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go. Ye judge after the fleſh, I judge no man." *John* viii. 14, 15. He added, that if he ſhould condemn any perſon for unbelief, the condemnation would be juſt, becauſe his miſſion was true, being confirmed by his own teſtimony, and that of his Almighty Father, the God of Jacob, by whoſe authority, and agreeable to whoſe will, all his ſentences would be paſſed. "And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that ſent me." *John* viii. 16.

Having thus aſſerted the divinity of his miſſion, and ſhewn that his judgment was juſt, he proceeded to inform them that the Father himſelf bare witneſs to the truth of his miſſion. You cannot, ſaid he, juſtly complain, even if I ſhould puniſh you for your unbelief, becauſe you are, by your own laws, commanded to believe the teſtimony of two witneſſes that my miſſion evidently is true. For the actions of my life, which are perfectly agreeable to the character of a meſſenger from heaven, bare ſufficient witneſs of me, and the Father by the miracles he has enabled me to perform, beareth witneſs of me; ye are therefore altogether culpable in objecting to my miſſion. "It is alſo written in your law, that the teſtimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witneſs of myſelf, and the Father that ſent me, beareth witneſs of me." *John* viii. 17, 18.

The Jews then aſked him, Where is the Father, the other witneſs to whom thou appealeſt? Jeſus replied, Your conduct ſufficiently demonſtrates that ye are ſtrangers both to me and my Father; for had ye known who I am, you muſt have always known whom it is I call my Father; had ye been convinced that I am the Meſſiah, you muſt alſo have been convinced that the Father is no other than

than that Omnipotent Being, who created and upholds all things, by the word of his power. "Then ſaid they unto him, Where is thy Father? Jeſus anſwered, Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye ſhould have known my Father alſo." *John* viii. 19.

This diſcourſe, the Evangeliſt tells us, was held in the treaſury, or court of the women, where the cheſts were placed for receiving the offerings of all who came up to worſhip in the temple; and muſt therefore have been a place of great reſort, being frequented by all, even the prieſts and rulers. But notwithſtanding the public manner in which our bleſſed Saviour now aſſerted his claim to the character of the Meſſiah, no man attempted to ſeize him; Providence not ſuffering them to put their malicious deſigns in execution, becauſe his "hour (or time of his ſufferings) was not yet come."

The debate being ended, Jeſus again repeated what he had before told them: namely, that he ſhould ſhortly depart from them; and that they ſhould then ſeek him, but not be able to find him. "I go my way, and ye ſhall ſeek me, and ſhall die in your ſins: whither I go, ye cannot come." *John* viii. 21. As if he had ſaid, After my aſcenſion into heaven, when the Roman armies ſhall ſpread horror and deſolation in every corner of the land, ye ſhall then earneſtly wiſh for the coming of the Meſſiah, in expectation of being delivered by his powerful arm from your cruel enemy: but ye ſhall then find your miſtake; ye ſhall die in your ſins, and be for ever excluded from the manſions of happineſs.

The Jews, by no means comprehended this departure of which our Lord told them. They even fancied he would deſtroy himſelf, becauſe they thought the only retreat where he was not to be found was the gloomy habitation of the grave. To which the bleſſed Jeſus replied, Your vile inſinuation betrays at once the wickedneſs of your hearts, and the baſeneſs of your original. Ye are from the earth, and therefore obnoxious to all the evil paſſions that infeſt human nature; and from the dictates of your own hearts, you fancy that I can be capable of committing the horrid crime of ſelf-murder. But my extraction is very different; it is from heaven, and conſequently my mind is not tainted with the corruption of this world. You, therefore, muſt believe, that I am the "bread of life," the heavenly manna, the light of

of the world, the true Meſſiah, if you are deſirous of being cleanſed from thoſe pollutions which flow from your earthly origin; but if ye ſtill continue in your unbelief, "you ſhall die in your ſins."

The Jews now, in order to vindicate themſelves, demanded what ſort of perſon he pretended to be? To which Jeſus anſwered, "Even the ſame that I ſaid unto you from the beginning (that is, at the beginning of this diſcourſe) the light of the world." Adding, "I have many things to ſay, and to judge of you: but he that ſent me is true; and I ſpeak to the world thoſe things which I have heard of him." *John* viii. 26.

This diſcourſe, however plain it may appear, was not underſtood by the perverſe Jews; they did not perceive "that he ſpoke to them of the Father." But Jeſus told them, that when they had crucified him, they would be convinced, by the miracles accompanying that awful hour, the reſurrection from the dead, the effuſion of the holy ſpirit on his diſciples, and the deſtruction of the Jewiſh nation, who he was, and the Father that ſent him. "When ye have lift up the Son of man, then ſhall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myſelf; but as my Father hath taught me, I ſpeak theſe things." *John* viii. 28.

He added, that though he ſhould be crucified as a malefactor, that puniſhment would not be inflicted on him, as a conſequence of his being deſerted by his Father: becauſe he would never leave him in any period of his miſery, or even at the hour of death, as he had always acted agreeable to his will.

Theſe words induced many of the people to believe him to be the Meſſiah. Perhaps by "lifting him up," they did not underſtand his crucifixion, but his aſcenſion to the throne of David; and hence ſuppoſed, that he now entertained ſentiments worthy of the Meſſiah, and were therefore very ready to acknowledge him as ſuch, and believe the doctrine he had delivered concerning his miſſion. But Jeſus told them, that if they perſevered in the belief and practiſe of his word, they ſhould, in reality, become his diſciples, have a title to that honourable appellation, be fully inſtructed in every doctrine of the Goſpel, and not only freed from the ſlavery of ſin and its conſequences, but alſo from the ceremonial laws delivered by Moſes. "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my diſciples indeed: and ye ſhall know

know the truth, and the truth ſhall make free." *John* viii. 31, 32.

The Jews, on hearing him mention that they ſhould be made free, anſwered, "We be Abraham's ſeed, and were never in bondage to any man." This aſſertion, if taken literally, was abſolutely falſe, the whole nation, at that very time, being in bondage to the Romans: nor were their anceſtors any ſtrangers to ſlavery, having ſeverely felt the hand of tyranny, both in Egypt, Aſſyria, and Babylon. The expreſſion, therefore, muſt be taken in a metaphorical ſenſe, to ſignify ſpiritual bondage: it was a freedom by truth, a freedom in reſpect of religion which they now aſſerted. They meant that they were the deſcendants of illuſtrious anceſtors; and, during the worſt of times, had preſerved ſentiments in religion and government worthy of the poſterity of Abraham; nor had the hotteſt perſecution of the Aſſyrian kings been able to compel them to embrace the religion of the heathens. In reſpect of truth, "we were never in bondage to any man: how ſayeſt thou, Ye ſhall be made free?"

In anſwer to this queſtion, Jeſus told them, that thoſe who gave themſelves up to a vicious courſe of life, and to the gratifications of their ſinful appetites, were abſolutely ſlaves, and how far they might deſerve that appellation, it was incumbent on them to conſider. "Verily, verily I ſay unto you, whoſoever committeth ſin is the ſervant of ſin. And as a ſlave cannot be aſſured of the continuance of his Maſter's favour, or certain of abiding continually in the family; ſo my Father can, when he pleaſes, diſcard ſuch habitual ſinners, deprive you of the external œconomy of religion, in which you ſo highly boaſt, as you have, through ſin, rendered yourſelves bond-men to his juſtice. If ye are deſirous of becoming the children of God, and of remaining for ever in his family, you muſt ſubmit to the authority of his ſon, and embrace his doctrine; which will induce him to adopt you as coheirs with himſelf. It is he only that can make you free indeed, and place you in the city of the heavenly Jeruſalem, without thel eaſt danger of being removed. I well know that you are, in a natural ſenſe, the ſeed of Abraham, but, in a moral one, the offsring of Satan; for many of you are deſirous of deſtroying me, becauſe I enjoin a greater degree of ſanctity than you are willing

to acquire. "I know that you are Abraham's ſeed; but ye ſeek to kill me, becauſe my word hath no place in you. I ſpeak that which I have ſeen with my Father; and ye do that which ye have ſeen with your Father. They anſwered and ſaid unto him, Abraham is our Father." *John* viii. 37, 38, 39.

Notwithſtanding their claim to immediate deſcent from that Father of the faithful, Jeſus told them that if they were the ſpiritual progeny of Abraham, they would reſemble that great and good man in his righteouſneſs; and therefore, inſtead of endeavouring to take away the life of a perſon who came with a revelation from God, they would believe on him, in imitation of Abraham, who was juſtly ſtiled the Father of the faithful, and the friend of God. "If ye were Abraham's children ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye ſeek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham." *John* viii. 39, 40.

Jeſus added, that their deeds ſufficiently ſhewed whoſe children they were, and from what ſtock they were deſcended; even from the great deceiver of mankind, who "goeth about like a roaring lion, ſeeking whom he may devour."

The Jews at length diſcovered the drift of our Lord's meaning, and accordingly replied, that they were undoubtedly in that ſenſe the children of God, as they were certainly not born of fornication, alluding to the marriage covenant, which in ſcripture is metaphorically ſaid to ſubſiſt between God and the children of Iſrael, and by which their obligation to love, honour, and obey him, was repreſented in a very lively manner. We are neither, ſaid the Jews, idolaters ourſelves, nor ſprung from idolatrous parents: conſequently we are, with reſpect to a ſpiritual deſcent, the children of God. "We be not born of fornication: we have one father, even God." *John* viii. 41.

But Jeſus told them, that an outward profeſſion of the true religion was of no conſequence. They muſt "love it in deed and in truth" if they hoped to be, in reality, the children of God: and if they truly loved religion, they muſt love him who came down from heaven on purpoſe to reveal it to the ſons of men.—Adding, that he did not come of himſelf, but was ſent by the great Creator of the univerſe. "If God were your Father, ye would love me; for I proceeded forth, and came from

from God: neither came I of myſelf, but he ſent me." *John* viii. 42.

But ye, continued the bleſſed Jeſus, inherit the nature of your father the devil: and therefore will continue to gratify the luſts ye have derived from him. He was an enemy and a murderer of mankind from the beginning, and has ever ſince exerted his whole power to work their deſtruction: ſometimes by ſeducing into ſin by his falſities, and ſometimes by inſtigating them to kill thoſe whom God thought proper to ſend to reclaim them. And having early departed from holineſs and truth, a cuſtom of lying is become habitual to him. Being therefore a liar and the father of lying, when he ſpeaketh a falſity, he ſpeaketh what is properly his own. But I tell you the truth: and therefore it is natural to think that ye will diſbelieve me. "Ye are of your father the devil, and the luſts of your father ye will do: he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, becauſe there is no truth in him. When he ſpeaketh a lie, he ſpeaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it.—And becauſe I tell you the truth, ye believe me not." *John* viii. 44, 45.

Though ye dare even to reject my doctrine, are any of you able to ſhew that I have not received my commiſſion from heaven, or that I have done any thing that has a tendency to render me unworthy of belief? Can you ſhew that I have taught falſe doctrines, reproved you unjuſtly for your actions, or been guilty myſelf of ſin? If you are unable to do this, but, on the contrary, muſt acknowledge, that my doctrine and life are ſuch as become a meſſenger of God, what reaſon can ye pretend for not believing me? "And if (in affirming I am perfectly free from ſin) I ſay the truth, why do ye not believe me?" Whoever is of God, receives with the greateſt humility, whatever revelations God is pleaſed to make of himſelf by his meſſengers, and makes it his ſtudy and delight to obey all his commandments. But ye reject the revelations and precepts of the Almighty, delivered by me who came down from heaven, for no other reaſon than becauſe ye are not the children of God. "He that is of God, heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not, becauſe ye are not of God. *John* viii. 47.

The Jews, ſtill attached to their lineal deſcent, replied, that his calling the deſcendants of Abraham the children

children of the devil, was a ſufficient proof that he was either a very profligate wretch himſelf or inſtigated by ſome evil ſpirit. But Jeſus told them he was neither mad, nor actuated by an evil ſpirit. On the contrary, he honoured his Father by ſpeaking the words of truth, which he had ſent him to deliver: and therefore, they diſhonoured him in calling him by ſo opprobious a title. Adding, that he did not, however, court their applauſe, nor, fear their reproaches; though there was one concerned to vindicate his honour, and ſeverely puniſh all who ſhould dare to attack it.

Our Lord, having declared his mighty and divine power, aſſerts the happy effects of faith and obedience to the Goſpel. "Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, If a man keep my ſaying, he ſhall never ſee death." *John* viii. 51. On this declaration, the Jews cried out, now we ſufficiently know that thou art poſſeſſed with a devil; for the moſt righteous perſons that ever flouriſhed among the ſons of men are dead: Abraham, and the prophets, and other holy men, are all laid in the chambers of the duſt, and yet thou haſt the impudence and folly to affirm, that whoever keeps thy precepts ſhall never die. Thou ſurely canſt not think, nor pretend to be more in favour with the Almighty than Abraham and the prophets were, who, though the ſtricteſt obſervers of the divine precepts, could not obtain the privilege of being themſelves exempt from the ſtroke of death, much leſs for their followers. "Now we know that thou haſt a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou ſayeſt, If a man keep my ſaying, he ſhall never taſte of death. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makeſt thou thyſelf?" *John* viii. 52, 53.

In reply to this impertinent query, the Meſſiah returned, if I ſhould attempt to ſpeak in praiſe of myſelf, you will call it vain and fooliſh, and, like the Phariſees, tell me, "Thou beareſt record of thyſelf: thy record is not true." Inſtead, therefore, of giving you a full deſcription of my dignity, I ſhall only inform you, that it is my Father who ſpeaketh honourably of me, by the many miracles he enables me to perform. And ſurely this may be ſufficient to convince you of what I have promiſed for my diſciples; eſpecially when I tell you, that my father is no other than the Almighty God of Jacob

Jacob, whom all the deſcendants of Abraham pretend to worſhip. But though you vainly boaſt of worſhipping my Father as your God, you are ignorant of him: you neither form juſt conceptions of him, nor worſhip him in the manner you ought. Your knowledge and actions, therefore, give the lie to your profeſſion; but, on the contrary, I entertain proper ideas of him, and obey his precepts. You may, perhaps, conſtrue this declaration as proceeding from vanity; but if I ſhould ſay I do not form adequate conceptions of him, or acknowledge him as he deſerves, I ſhould be a liar like unto you. Even your father Abraham, of whom you ſo highly boaſt, earneſtly deſired to behold the time when I, the promiſed ſeed, ſhould appear in the world to teach and convert all the nations of the earth from their idolatry to the knowledge and worſhip of the true God. He earneſtly deſired to ſee the great tranſactions of my life, by which this invaluable bleſſing was to be procured for all the ſons of men; and view the happy ſtate of all nations, when this bleſſing was beſtowed upon them. This was granted him: he "ſaw it and was glad." He was favoured with the raviſhing proſpect of theſe happy times, then concealed in the womb of futurity, and was exceedingly tranſported with the ſcene. "Your Father Abraham rejoiced to ſee my day: and he ſaw it, and was glad." *John* viii. 56.

The Jews, ſtill blind to the ſpiritual meaning of our Lord's words, concluded he had affirmed that he was before Abraham; and knowing he was not yet fifty years old, conſidered it as abſolutely ridiculous.—They had no conception of his divine nature, though he had ſo often told them he was the Son of God, and conſequently exiſted with the Father, long before this world was called from its primitive chaos.—This groſs ſtupidity and perverſeneſs induced the Saviour of the world to aſſert his dignity in ſtill plainer terms: "Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." *John* viii. 58.

The Jews, incenſed at our Lord's prior claim to Abraham, in point of exiſtence, ruſhed on him, and attempted to ſtone him; but Jeſus, by rendering himſelf inviſible, paſſed unhurt through the crowd, and retired out of the temple.

CHAP.

CHAP. XIX.

Our Lord continues to work Miracles in Confirmation of his Miſſion and Doctrine. Calls forth and ſends out ſeventy Diſciples. Preaches to the People of Judea, by Way of Parable.

THE great Preacher of Iſrael, having defeated the cruel deſigns of the obſtinate Jews, was paſſing through the city, and ſaw in one of the ſtreets a man who had been blind from his birth. The ſight of ſo affecting an object could not fail to excite the compaſſion of the benevolent Saviour of mankind. Nor could the affronts and indignities he had juſt received from the Jews hinder him from "working the works of him that ſent him," and diſpenſing bleſſings on that rebellious and ungrateful nation. Accordingly, he beheld this poor blind man, not with a tranſient view but fixed on him the eyes of his divine compaſſion, and preſented him with the riches of his adorable love.

The diſciples obſerving the affectionate regard of their Maſter to this object of compaſſion, and probably imagining that he was going to extend his uſual mercy to this unfortunate object, aſked their Maſter, whether his blindneſs was occaſioned by his own ſin, or the ſin of his parents? They had often heard their Maſter ſay, that afflictions were commonly the puniſhment of particular ſins; and had learned, from the law of Moſes, that ſin was the fruitful ſource of evil; and that the Lord puniſhed the iniquities of the fathers upon the children. Their Maſter kindly anſwered, that neither his own nor the ſins of the parents were the immediate cauſe of this peculiar puniſhment, but that he was born blind, "that the works of God ſhould be made manifeſt in him;" particularly his ſovereignty in bringing him blind into the world, his power in conferring the faculty of ſight upon him, and his goodneſs in bearing witneſs to the doctrine by which men are to be ſaved.

We may learn by this pertinent reply of the Saviour of the world, that a curious enquiry into the afflictions of other men may be ſafely avoided; and that we ought to ſuppoſe every calamity ſubſervient to the glory of Omnipotence; never imputing to their perſonal ſins whatever miſeries we behold in others, leſt, like the diſciples in the preſent caſe, we aſſign to ſin, what owes its origin to the glory of our Maker.

Having aſſigned the cauſe of this perſon's blindneſs, namely, "that the works of God ſhould be made manifeſt in him (Jeſus added) I muſt work

work the works of him that ſent me, while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work;" intimating to his diſciples, and all the ſons of men, his unwearied labour in the work of the Almighty Father. In this he was occupied day and night, during the time of his ſojourning in the world. To this alone he directed all his thoughts and all his intentions. This he eſteemed even as his meat and drink; and for this he ſuffered the neglect of his ordinary food, that he might finiſh the bleſſed, the beneficent work of human ſalvation. A work, to accompliſh which he was commiſſioned from heaven; and, during the execution of it, went about doing good.

It was now the ſabbath day, and the bleſſed Jeſus was going to perform a miracle, in which there was to be a ſmall degree of ſervile work, and therefore he told his diſciples, that they need not be ſurprized to ſee him work miracles of that kind on the ſabbath day. For though they ſhould imagine that he might defer them till the day of reſt was over, his time on earth was ſo ſhort, that he was obliged to embrace every opportunity that offered of working miracles. Perhaps he choſe to perform this work on the ſabbath, becauſe he knew the Phariſees would, for that reaſon, enquire into it with the utmoſt attention, and conſequently render it more generally known.

But however this be, our bleſſed Saviour, who was now going to confer ſight on one that was born blind, took occaſion from thence to ſpeak of himſelf as one appointed to give light alſo to the minds of men involved in darkneſs. "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

It appears from hence, that our Saviour's miracles were deſigned not only as proofs of his miſſion, but alſo as ſpecimens of the power he poſſeſſed as the Meſſiah. For example, by feeding the multitude with the meat that periſhed, he ſignified that he was come to quicken and nouriſh mankind, with the bread of life, that ſovereign cordial, and ſalutary nutriment of the ſoul. His giving ſight to the blind was a lively emblem of the efficacy of his doctrine to illuminate the blinded underſtandings of men. His healing their bodies repreſented his power to heal their ſouls, and was a ſpecimen of his authority to forgive ſins, as it was a real, though a partial removal of its puniſhment. His caſting

ing out devils was an earneſt of his final victory over Satan, and all his powers. His raiſing particular perſons from the dead was the beginning of his triumph over death, and a demonſtration of his ability to accompliſh a general reſurrection; and, in a word, his curing all promiſcuouſly, who applied to him, ſhewed that he was come not to condemn the world, but to ſave, even the chief of ſinners. Accordingly, at, or ſoon after, performing theſe miracles, when the memory of them was freſh in the minds of his hearers, we often find him turning his diſcourſe to the ſpiritual things they repreſented. But to return from this digreſſion.

Having declared the ſalutary deſign of his coming into the world, "He ſpat on the ground, and made clay of the ſpittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and ſaid unto him, Go waſh in the pool of Siloam (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and waſhed, and came ſeeing." *John* ix. 6, 7.

From former example, it is evident that our bleſſed Saviour could as eaſily have performed this miracle without the aſſiſtance of any external means. Indeed, thoſe the great Redeemer of mankind made uſe of on this occaſion were ſo far from being likely to effect the cure that they ſeem properly adapted to produce a quite contrary effect. We muſt, therefore, conclude, that they were intended to direct our attention to higher myſteries, and ſhew us, as in a glaſs, that it is the effect of the ſame divine power who at firſt created man out of the duſt of the earth, and gave ſight to his eyes, that now reſtores and regenerates lapſed mankind and opens the eyes cloſed with the black cement of ſin.

This perſon ſeems to have known the power of the Redeemer, or at leaſt to have been informed by ſome perſon near him, who Jeſus was, the fame of whoſe miracles, had been publiſhed in every corner of Judea. Indeed, we cannot otherwiſe account for the implicit and ready obedience paid him by the blind man, who was ſo amply rewarded for his faith and confidence, by receiving the invaluable gift of ſight.

This miraculous operation could not fail of producing a general curioſity and ſurprize, and inducing thoſe who had ſeen this blind man in his dark and deplorable condition, to be very particular in their enquiries

ries into the means of ſo ſingular a miracle. It was doubtleſs the ſubject of general converſation; and it is natural to think ſhould alſo have proved the means of a general converſion: but, as too frequently happens a perverſe curioſity prevented its ſalutary effect upon their ſoul. Unbelief, and hardneſs of heart, led ſome of them even to doubt of the plaineſt fact; a fact the moſt evident and indiſputable, and plainly the work of ſupernatural power, while others perſecuted at once both the object, and the author of it! "The neighbours, therefore, and they which before had ſeen him, that he was blind, ſaid, Is not this he that ſat and begged? Some ſaid, This is he: others ſaid, He is like him: but he ſaid, I am he." *John* ix. 8, 9.

The man, tranſported with gratitude and joy, and perceiving his neighbours to doubt of the identity of his perſon, proclaimed himſelf to be the very ſame, whom they lately ſaw begging in total darkneſs. I am he, thus wonderfully bleſt with ſight, by the peculiar mercy of the Almighty! I am he who was blind from my birth, whom ye have all ſeen, and many relieved in my miſerable diſtreſs! I am he who was, even from my mother's womb, involved in total darkneſs, but now enjoy the enlivening light of day!

So genuine an acknowledgment of the fact excited their curioſity to know how this admirable effect was produced. "How were thine eyes opened?" To this queſtion he readily replied, "A man that is called Jeſus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and ſaid unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and waſh; and I went and waſhed, and I received ſight." *John* ix. 11. They then aſked him where the perſon was, who had performed ſo ſtupendous a work? to which the man anſwered, "I know not:" For Jeſus had retired while the man went to waſh his eyes in the pool of Siloam, probably to avoid the applauſes which would naturally have been given him, and which we ſee through the whole Goſpel he generally ſtudied to avoid.

The neighbours, either ſtimulated by envy, or excited by a deſire of having the truth of this extraordinary event ſearched to the bottom, brought the man before the council as the proper judges of this affair. Accordingly, he was no ſooner placed before the aſſembly, than the Phariſees began to queſtion him, "how he had recovered his ſight." Not

daunted by this awful aſſembly, though terrible to a man of his mean circumſtances, he boldly anſwered, "He put clay upon mine eyes, and I waſhed, and do ſee." *John* ix. 15.

On hearing this account of the miracle, the Phariſees declared that the author of it muſt be an impoſtor, becauſe he had, by performing it, violated the ſabbath-day. But others, more candid in their way of thinking, gave it as their opinion, that no deceiver could poſſibly work a miracle of that kind, becauſe it was too great and beneficial for any evil being to have either the inclination or power to perform.

The court being thus divided in their opinion with regard to the character of Jeſus, they aſked the man himſelf what he thought of the perſon who had conferred on him the bleſſing of ſight? To which he boldly and plainly anſwered, "He is a prophet." But the Jews hoping to prove the whole a cheat, ſtarted another objection, namely, that this perſon was not born blind, tho' all his neighbours had really teſtified the truth of it. Accordingly, they called his parents, and aſked them, Whether he was their ſon; if he had been born blind; and by what means he had obtained his ſight? To which they anſwered, that he was truly their ſon, and had been born blind; but with regard to the manner in which he received his ſight, and the perſon who had conferred it on him, they could give no information: their ſon was of age, and he ſhould anſwer for himſelf. "Theſe words ſpake his parents, becauſe they feared the Jews; for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confeſs that he was Chriſt, he ſhould be put out of the ſynagogue." *John* ix. 22.

This proves that the conviction of conſcience acts powerfully on the mind. The parents of this blind man well knew by what means their ſon had received his ſight; and, like him, they ſhould have glorified the divine hand that had wrought ſo marvellous a work, and dared to have confeſſed him before all men, whatever dangers might have threatened them. Let us learn from hence to fear our own, and pity human frailty, and to implore the aſſiſtance of the holy ſpirit, to give us courage and reſolution in the day of trial: and let us take care, not to love the praiſe of men more than the praiſe of God.

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The phariſees, finding that all attempts either to diſcredit, or diſprove the fact, uſeleſs, had recourſe to their uſual method of calumniating the author of it. They called again "the man that was blind, and ſaid unto him, Give God the praiſe: we know that this man is a ſinner." *John* ix. 24. To which the man boldly anſwered theſe rulers of Iſrael, "Whether he be a ſinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I ſee." *John* ix. 25.

This reply prevailed not with the obſtinate Jews; they were deſirous of confounding him with repeated queſtions, and the art of ſophiſtry, and accordingly aſked him, "What did he to thee? How opened he thine eyes?" They had before aſked theſe queſtions, but now propoſed them a ſecond time, in order that the man, by repeating his account of the ſervile work performed at the cure, might become ſenſible that Jeſus had thereby violated the ſabbath, and conſequently muſt be an impoſtor.

Thus the enemies of our Redeemer would gladly have prevailed on the perſon who had received the invaluable gift of ſight, to join with them in the judgment they paſſed on the great perſon who had wrought ſo ſtupendous a miracle. But their obſtinacy in denying the truth appeared ſo criminal to him, that he boldly anſwered, "I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye alſo be his diſciples?" *John* ix. 27.

The council were highly exaſperated at this retort. "They reviled him, and ſaid, Thou art his diſciple; but we are Moſes' diſciples. We know that God ſpake unto Moſes: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is." *John* ix. 28, 29.

The poor man, incenſed at their unbelief and hardneſs of heart, replied, It is very ſtrange that you ſhould not acknowledge the divine miſſion of a teacher who performs ſuch aſtoniſhing miracles; for common ſenſe ſufficiently declares that God never aſſiſts impoſtors in working miracles: and accordingly there cannot be a ſingle example found, ſince the creation of the world, of any ſuch perſon opening the eyes of one born blind. My opinion, therefore, is, that if this man had not been ſent by God, he could not work any miracle at all. "The man anſwered, and ſaid unto them, Why, herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet

yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not ſinners: but if any man be a worſhipper of God, and doth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing." *John* ix. 30, &c.

The honeſt man's arguments, though plain, were powerful, and founded upon truths they could not deny. They all owned that "God heareth not ſinners:" they all knew that God had heard Jeſus, by the miracle he had wrought, which was a fact proved beyond any poſſibility of doubt, and was ſuch as never man performed; it therefore undeniably followed, that Jeſus was not a ſinner, but ſent from God, ſince otherwiſe he could do nothing.

The Phariſees were not ignorant that this argument was concluſive; they felt its whole force, and well knew that it could not be reſiſted. Accordingly they did not attempt to anſwer it, but had recourſe to puniſhment and abuſive language. Thou wicked, illiterate, impudent mortal, ſaid they, whoſe underſtanding is ſtill as blind as thy body lately was, and who was born under the heavieſt puniſhment of ſin, doſt thou pretend to inſtruct in a matter of this kind, the guides of the people, and thoſe who have rendered themſelves eminent for their knowledge in the law? "Thou waſt altogether born in ſin, and doeſt thou teach us?" *John* ix. 34.

After their preſumptuous taunts, the Evangeliſt adds, that "they caſt him out;" that is, they paſſed on him the ſentance of excommunication, which was the higheſt puniſhment they had power to inflict. But though he was cut off from the Jewiſh ſociety, the Almighty thought proper to unite him to one, where no unjuſt ſentences can ever be paſſed, nor any member be ever ſeparated, during a joyful eternity.

The preſumption of the Phariſees ſhould teach us to contemplate the various arts and ſubtle endeavours of all the adverſaries and enemies of the goſpel and croſs of Chriſt; and not be ſurprized to find them, though in different ſhapes, employed againſt ourſelves, if we zealouſly embrace the truth of Chriſt, as well as againſt thoſe who are not afraid to confeſs before all men the glory of him who hath opened their eyes. It is impoſſible that the world ſhould love thoſe who boldly declare that its

its works are evil. Let us not, therefore, be ſhaken when we come to experience it, but learn from this blind man, freely and openly to confeſs the faith, and to declare the power of that God, who hath brought us from darkneſs to this marvellous light, and turned our feet into the way of peace.

The feaſt of dedication now drew near. This ſolemnity was not appointed by Moſes, but by that heroic reformer, Judas Maccabeus, in commemoration of his having cleanſed the temple, and reſtored its worſhip, after both had been polluted by Antiochus Epiphanes.

Although this feaſt was merely of human inſtitution, Jeſus determined to be preſent at it, even tho' he knew that father attempts would be made againſt his life. His public miniſtry was, indeed, now drawing near its period: and therefore the bleſſed Jeſus would not omit any opportunity of preaching to the loſt ſheep of the houſe of Iſrael, and of doing good to the children of men. Nor did he now, as he had formerly done, travel privately to the capital, but openly declared his intention of going to Jeruſalem, and ſet forwards on his journey with great courage and reſolution.

The road from Galilee to Jeruſalem, lay through Samaria, and the inhabitants were thoſe which entertained the moſt inveterate hatred againſt all who worſhipped in Jeruſalem. Jeſus, being no ſtranger to this diſpoſition of the Samaritans, thought proper to ſend meſſengers before him, that they might, againſt his arrival, find reception for him in one of the villages. The prejudiced Samaritans, finding the intention of his journey was to worſhip in the temple at Jeruſalem, refuſed to receive either him or his diſciples into their houſes.

The meſſengers, being thus diſappointed, returned to Jeſus, and gave him an account of all that had paſſed; at which James and John were ſo exceedingly incenſed, that they propoſed to their Maſter to call for fire from heaven, in order to deſtroy ſuch inhoſpitable wretches; alledging in excuſe for ſuch violent proceedings, the example of the prophet Elijah, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and conſume them, even as Elias did?" *Luke* ix 54.

Our Lord, deſirous of diſplaying an example of humility on every occaſion, ſharply rebuked them for entertaining ſo unbecoming a reſent-

ment for this offence. "Ye know not (ſaid he) what manner of ſpirit ye are of." Ye are ignorant of the ſinfulneſs of the diſpoſition ye have now expreſſed; nor do ye conſider the difference of times, perſons, and diſpenſations.

The ſeverity exerciſed by Elijah on the men who came from Ahab to apprehend him was a juſt repoof to an idolatrous king and people; very proper for the times, and very agreeable to the characters, both of the prophet who gave it, and of the offenders to whom it was given; and at the ſame time not unſuitable to the Moſaic diſpenſation. But the goſpel breathed a very different ſpirit; and the intention of the Meſſiah's coming into the world was, not to deſtroy, but to ſave, the lives of the children of men.

Ye wiſe of this world, who reject ſaving knowledge, behold, here an inſtance of patience, under a real and unprovoked injury, which you cannot parallel among all your boaſted heroes of antiquity! An inſtance of patience which expreſſed infinite ſweetneſs of diſpoſition, and ſhould be imitated by all the human race, eſpecially by thoſe who call themſelves the diſciples of Chriſt.

Being denied reception by the inhoſpitable inhabitants of this Samaritan village, Jeſus, attended by his diſciples, directed his way towards another; and as they travelled, a certain man ſaid to him, "Lord, I will follow thee, whitherſoever thou goeſt." But Jeſus, to whom the ſecret purpoſe of all hearts were open, knowing he only deſired the riches and honours of the Meſſiah's kingdom, thought proper to make him ſenſible of his miſtake; and accordingly ſaid to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have neſts, but the ſon of man hath not where to lay his head." *Luke* ix. 58. I am ſo far from boaſting of a temporal kingdom, and the power and pomp attending it, that I have not even the accommodations provided by nature for the beaſts of the field and the fowls of the air. They have ſafe and ſecure retreats; but the ſon of man is deſtitute of an habitation.

Jeſus, in the courſe of his wandering, met with one who had formerly been his diſciple, and ordered him to diſengage himſelf from all worldly employments, and to follow him; but he was deſirous of excuſing himſelf for the preſent, under the pretence, that he was bound by the ties of gratitude to continue with his aged father, till death had put a period

riod to his exiſtence, and he had laid his remains in the ſepulchre of his anceſtors. "Lord (ſaid he) ſuffer me firſt to go and bury my father." To which Jeſus anſwered, "Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God." *Luke* ix. 60. Let thoſe that are immerſed in worldly affairs, follow the affairs of the world; but thoſe who have embraced the doctrines of the goſpel do every thing in their power to ſpread the glad tidings of ſalvation in every corner of the earth.

A third perſon offered to follow him, provided he wovld give him the liberty to return to his houſe, and take leave of his family: but Jeſus told him, that he ſhould not ſuffer any domeſtic affairs to interfere with the care of his ſalvation; that the calls of religion were too preſſing to admit of the leaſt delay or excuſe whatever; and that all who ſet themſelves to ſeek the welfare of their ſouls ſhould purſue the work aſſiduouſly, without looking careleſſly around them, as if they were regardleſs of the work they had undertaken to perform. "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." *Luke* ix. 62.

As our bleſſed Saviour's miniſtry was, from this time, till its final period, to be confined to Judea, and the countries beyond Jordan, it was neceſſary that ſome harbingers ſhould be ſent into every town and village he was to viſit to prepare his way. Accordingly, he called his ſeventy diſciples unto him, and after inſtructing them in the duties of their miſſion, and the particulars they were to obſerve in their journey, he ſent them into different parts of the country, to thoſe particular places whither he himſelf intended to follow them, and preach the doctrines of the goſpel to the inhabitants.

Our Lord, according to his own declaration, diſpatched theſe diſciples on the ſame important meſſage as he had done the twelve before.

The harveſt was plenteous in Judea and Perea, as well as in Galilee, and the labourers alſo few; and being never more to preach in Chorazin, Bethſaida, and Capernaum, the cities wherein he had uſually reſided, he could not help reflecting on the reception he had met with from the inhabitants of thoſe cities. He foreſaw the terrible conſequences that would flow from their rejecting his doctrine, and the many kind offers he had made them. He was grieved for their obſtinacy; and, in the overflowing

overflowing tenderneſs of his ſoul, he lamented the hardneſs of their hearts. "Wo (ſaid he) unto thee, Chorazin, wo unto thee, Bethſaida: for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, ſitting in ſack-cloth and aſhes. But it ſhall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, ſhalt be thruſt down to hell." *Luke* x. 13, 14, 15. To which our Saviour added, as ſome conſolation to his diſciples, "He that heareth you, heareth me: and he that deſpiſeth you, deſpiſeth me: and he that deſpiſeth me, deſpiſeth him that ſent me." *Luke* x. 16.

Such a token of heavenly regard could not fail of comforting the ſeventy, and alleviating their minds when thinking of the ill uſage they expected to meet with during the courſe of their miſſion. They well knew, that the preaching of Chriſt himſelf had been often deſpiſed, and often unſucceſsful, with reſpect to many of his hearers; and therefore, they had not the leaſt reaſon to expect that they ſhould find a more welcome reception than their Maſter.

The ſeventy diſciples, having received their inſtructions, and the power of working miracles from the Meſſiah, departed to execute their important commiſſion in the cities and villages of Judea and Perea. And after viſiting the ſeveral places, publiſhing the glad tidings of ſalvation, and working many miracles in confirmation of their miſſion, they returned to their Maſter with great joy, ſaying; "Lord, even the devils are ſubject unto us, through thy name!"

From this appeal it ſeems that they knew not the extent of their delegated power: and were pleaſingly ſurpriſed to find the apoſtate ſpirits tremble at their command. To which their great Maſter replied, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." You will be no longer aſtoniſhed that the devils are ſubject to the power I have given you, when I tell you that their prince is not able to ſtand before me: and, accordingly, when I firſt came into the world, in order to deſtroy him and his works, I ſaw him, with the ſwiftneſs of the lightning's flaſh, fall from heaven. Adding, in order to increaſe their joy, and prove that he had really caſt Satan down from the ſeats of heaven, that he would enlarge their power. "Behold,

hold (ſays he) I give unto you power to tread on ſerpents and ſcorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing ſhall by any means hurt you." *Luke* x. 19.

Leſt they ſhould exult beyond meaſure in the honour thus conferred on them, which was merely temporary, our Lord adds, "Notwithſtanding, in this rejoice not, that the ſpirits are ſubject unto you; but rather rejoice, becauſe your names are written in heaven." *Luke* x. 20.

Nor could the bleſſed Jeſus reflect on the unſearchable wiſdom and goodneſs of the divine diſpenſations to mankind, without feeling extraordinary joy: ſo that his beneficent heart overflowed with ſtrains of gratitude; "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou haſt hid thoſe things from the wiſe and prudent, and haſt revealed them unto babes: even ſo, Father, for ſo it ſeemed good in thy ſight." *Luke* x. 21.

When the diſciples had executed their commiſſions, Jeſus left Samaria, and retired into Judea, and in the way was met by a certain lawyer, or ſcribe, who being deſirous of knowing whether the doctrines preached by Jeſus were the ſame with thoſe before delivered by Moſes, aſked him, What he ſhould do to inherit eternal life? It is really amazing that any mortal ſhould aſk a queſtion like this, with a view to tempt, not to be inſtructed! This was, however, the caſe; but the bleſſed Jeſus, though no ſtranger to the moſt ſecret thoughts of the heart, did not reply, as he had before done to the Phariſees, "Why tempteſt thou me, thou hypocrite?" He turned the ſcribe's weapons againſt himſelf; what, ſaid he, is written in the law, of which thou profeſſeſt thyſelf a teacher, "How readeſt thou?" That law will teach thee what thou muſt do to be ſaved; and happy will it be for thee, if thou complieſt with its precepts. The ſcribe anſwered, it is there written, "Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy ſtrength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyſelf." *Luke* x. 27.

Our Lord then ſhews the ſtrength and ſpirituality of the Law, "Thou haſt anſwered right; this do, and thou ſhalt live." Perform theſe commands, and thou haſt fulfilled the duties of an Iſraelite: for on theſe two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Where is the man that can fulfil

the law? The lawyer, who in all probability expected no such answer, being conscious of his defects, and, consequently, of the impossibility of obtaining eternal life on these conditions, was willing, as the sacred historian informs us, "to justify himself;" was willing to stifle the rising suggestions of his own conscience, and, at the same time, to make a shew of his own devotion; and in order to this, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" A question very natural to be asked by a bigotted Jew, whose narrow notions led him to despise all who were not of his own fold; all who were not the natural descendants of his father Abraham.

To remove their obstinate attachment to their own principles, open their hearts to a more generous and noble way of thinking, and shew them the only foundation of true love, and the extensive relation they and all mankind stand in to each other, our Saviour delivered the following most beautiful and instructive parable.

A certain person in his journey from Jerusalem to Jericho, had the misfortune to fall into the hands of robbers, who not content with taking his money, stripped him of his raiment, beat him in a deplorable manner, and left him for dead.—While he continued in this miserable condition, utterly incapable of assisting himself, a certain priest happened to travel the same road; "and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side." So little compassion had these ministers of religion for a brother in the most deplorable circumstances of distress, that they continued their journey, without offering to assist so miserable an object, notwithstanding their sacred characters obliged them to perform, on every occasion, the tender offices of charity and compassion. It was a brother, a descendant of Abraham in distress; and therefore those hypocrites could offer no reasons to palliate their inhumanity. Their stony hearts could behold the affecting object of an unfortunate Israelite, lying in the road naked and cruelly wounded, without being the least affected with his distress.

Though these teachers of religion were hypocrites, and wholly destitute of grace and charity, compassion glowed in the heart of a Samaritan, who, coming to the spot where

where this helpleſs object lay, ran to him; and though he found him to be a perſon of a different nation, and one who profeſſed a religion oppoſite to his own, yet the hatred which had been inſtilled into his mind from his earlieſt years, and every objection ariſing from the animoſity ſubſiſting between the Jews and Samaritans, were immediately ſilenced by the tender ſenſation of pity, awakened by the ſight of ſuch complicated diſtreſs; his bowels yearned towards the miſerable object; though a Jew, he flew to him, and aſſiſted him in the moſt tender manner.

It was the cuſtom in theſe eaſtern countries for travellers to carry their proviſions with them: ſo that this compaſſionate Samaritan was enabled, though in the deſert, to give the wounded man a little wine to recruit his ſpirits. He alſo bound up his wounds, pouring into them wine and oil, placed him on his own beaſt, and walked himſelf on foot to ſupport him. In this manner he conducted him to an inn, took care of him during the night; and in the morning, when buſineſs called him to purſue his journey, recommended him to the care of the hoſt, left what money he could ſpare, and deſired that nothing might be denied him; for whatever was expended he would repay at his return.

Having finiſhed the parable, Jeſus turned himſelf to the lawyer, and aſked him, "Which now of thoſe three, thinkeſt thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?" The lawyer, ſtruck with the truth and evidence of the caſe, replied, without the leaſt heſitation, "He that ſheweth mercy on him." Upon which Jeſus replied, "Go, and do thou likewiſe." Perform all the good actions in thy power, extend thy kindneſs to every one, who ſtands in need of thy aſſiſtance, whether he be an Iſraelite, an Heathen, or a Samaritan. Conſider every man as thy neighbour in reſpect to works of charity, and make no enquiry with regard to his country or religion, but only with regard to his circumſtances.

On examination of the particulars of this beautiful parable, we ſhall find that it is compoſed in the fineſt manner to work the conviction deſigned; ſo that the lawyer, however deſirous of conſidering thoſe of the Jewiſh religion only as his neighbours, it was impoſſible for him to do it on this occaſion. The Jews had long conſidered the favours of a Samaritan as a more deteſtable abomi-

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nation thanthe eating ſwine's fleſh; yet, notwithſtanding this prepoſſeſſion, the lawyer was obliged to acknowledge that neither the prieſt, nor the levite, but the travelling Samaritan, by diſcharging the great office of humanity to the Jew in diſtreſs, was truly his neighbour; that the like humanity was due from any Iſraelite to a Samaritan in the like diſtreſſed circumſtances; and, conſequently, that men are neighbours, without any regard to country, kindred, language, or religion.

Mankind are intimately connected by their common wants, and their common weakneſſes. Providence has formed them in ſuch a maner, that they cannot ſubſiſt without the aſſiſtance of each other; and, conſequently, the relation ſubſiſting between them is as extenſive as their natures, and their obligations to aſſiſt each other by mutual good offices as ſtrong as the neceſſities of every individual. Our bleſſed Saviour has, therefore, by this admirable parable, ſhewn that the heart is the ſeat of genuine grace, and that good principles will ever produce good actions.

CHAP. XX.

The humble Jeſus reſides with Martha and Mary, two obſcure Women of Bethany. Improves a Circumſtance which occurred at the Feaſt of Dedication. Preſcribes a Mode of Prayer to his Diſciples and future Followers. And reviſits ſome of the Phariſaical Tribe.

THE feaſt of the dedication approaching, Jeſus turned his courſe towards Jeruſalem, and in the evening came to the houſe of Martha and Mary, the ſiſters of Lazarus, at Bethany. Martha was deſirous of expreſſing her regard for the divine gueſt, by providing for him and his diſciples the beſt entertainment in her power. But her ſiſter, who was of a more contemplative diſpoſition, ſat quietly at the feet of Jeſus, liſtening with the utmoſt attention to his doctrine. For the great Redeemer of mankind never omitted any opportunity of declaring the gracious offers of the Almighty, and his unſpeakable love for the children of men. Martha, being greatly fatigued with the burthen of the ſervice, complained to Jeſus of the little care Mary took to aſſiſt her, "Lord, doſt thou not care that my ſiſter haſt left me to ſerve alone? Bid her therefore that ſhe help me." *Luke* x. 40.

But Martha's officiouſneſs incurred our Lord's reproof, who commended Mary for her attentive application to his doctrine. "Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and troubled about many

many things: but one thing is needful. And Mary hath choſen that good part, which ſhall not be taken away from her." *Luke* x. 41, 42.

When Jeſus repaired to Jeruſalem, to celebrate the feaſt of dedication, he was informed that the beggar he had reſtored to ſight at the feaſt of tabernacle was, by the council, caſt out of the Synagogue. This information excited the pity of the Son of God; and he reſolved to make him full amends for the injury he had ſuffered. It was not long before he met the ſuffering perſon, and ſaid to him, "Doſt thou believe on the Son of God? He anſwered and ſaid, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jeſus ſaid unto him, Thou haſt both ſeen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he ſaid, Lord, I believe. And he worſhipped him." *John* ix 35

We have hinted, that the beggar was thoroughly convinced the perſon who opened his eyes was a meſſenger from heaven; it is, therefore, no wonder that as ſoon as he knew Jeſus was the perſon who had performed ſo great a work, he readily believed him to be the Son of God.

Our Saviour, having thus given the poor man ample proof of his Meſſiahſhip, directed his diſcourſe to the people, and ſaid unto them, "For judgment I am come into this world: that they which ſee not, might ſee; and that they which ſee, might be made blind." *John* ix. 39. The meaning of our Saviour, though he alluded to the blind man, was ſpiritual. He did not intend to repreſent the deſign of his coming, but the effect it would have on the minds of men; as it would demonſtrate what character and diſpoſition every perſon poſſeſſed. The humble, the docile, and the honeſt, though they were immerſed in the night of darkneſs, with regard to religion and the knowledge of the ſcriptures, ſhould be enlightened by his coming, as the blind man had enjoyed the invaluable gift of ſight from his hands: but thoſe who were wiſe, learned, and enlightened in their own opinion, ſhould appear in their true character, abſolutely ignorant, fooliſh, and blind.

The Phariſees, who happened to be preſent, when he ſpake theſe words to the people, imagined that he intended to throw a reflection on their ſect, which the common people, from their ſkill in the law, held in great veneration. Accordingly, they aſked him, with diſdain, "Are we blind alſo?" Doſt thou place us, who are teachers, and have taken

ſuch pains to acquire the knowledge of the Scriptures, on a level with the vulgar? To which Jeſus anſwered, "If ye were blind ye ſhould have no ſin; but now ye ſay, We ſee, therefore your ſin remaineth." If ye had not enjoyed the faculties and opportunities of diſcerning the proofs of my miſſion, you might have been conſidered as blind. But as ye are ſuperior to the vulgar, in point of learning, and at the ſame time your hearts averſe from acknowledging the truth, your enlightened underſtanding will only aggravate your guilt.

Having condemned the obſtinacy and prejudice of the ſect, in rejecting the moſt evident tokens of the divinity of his miſſion, he continued the reproof, by deſcribing the characters of a true, and falſe teacher. It was our Lord's cuſtom always to allude to objects before him; and being now in the outer court of the temple, near the ſheep, which were there expoſed to ſale, for ſacrifice, he compared the teachers among the Jews to ſhepherds, and the people to ſheep; a metaphor often uſed by the old prophets. He conſidered two kinds of bad ſhepherds or teachers: the one who, inſtead of entering in by the door to lead the flocks to the richeſt paſtures, entered ſome other way, with an intention only to kill, to ſteal, and to deſtroy; the other, who though they entered by the door to feed their flocks, with the diſpoſitions of hirelings, yet when the wolf appeared, they deſerted the ſheep, having no love for any but themſelves. By the former, he plainly alluded to the Phariſees, who had caſt the man born blind out of the ſynagogue; for no other reaſon, than becauſe he would not act contrary to the dictates of his conſcience, and agree with them in declaring Jeſus to be an impoſtor. But though they had caſt him out of the church, Chriſt received him into his, which is the true church, the ſpiritual incloſure, where the ſheep go in and out, and find paſture.

To illuſtrate the alluſion, it ſhould be obſerved, that the ſheep which were brought to be ſold, were incloſed in little folds, within the outer court of the temple; ſo that the ſhepherd himſelf could not enter, till the porter had opened the door. And from this circumſtance, the following parabolical diſcourſe may be eaſily underſtood. "Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the ſheep-fold, but climbeth up ſome other way, the ſame

ſame is a thief and a robber. *John* x. 1. Believe me, that whoſoever, in any age of the church, aſſumed the office of a teacher, without a commiſſion from me, was a thief and a robber: and in the preſent age he is no better who aſſumes that office without my commiſſion, and particularly without believing on me. "But he that entereth in by the door, is the ſhepherd of the ſheep. To him the porter openeth; and the ſheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own ſheep by name, and leadeth them out: and when he putteth forth his own ſheep, he goeth before them, and the ſheep follow him: for they know his voice." *John* x. 2, 3, 4.

The doctrine here inculcated is, that good men are obedient to the inſtructions of true and faithful teachers; and that the latter, in every caſe, ſhew them their duty with the greateſt plainneſs, not concealing it, becauſe it may be diſagreeable to their inclinations. On the contrary, "A ſtranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of ſtrangers." *John* x. 5. The people of God will not hearken to impoſtors and falſe teachers, but flee from them, like ſheep from the voice of a ſtranger: for they can eaſily diſtinguiſh them from the meſſengers of God, by their fruits, their doctrines, and their lives.

Thus did the great Redeemer of mankind, by this inſtructive parabolical diſcourſe, explain to the Phariſees the difference between true and falſe teachers; but they being ignorant of his meaning, he added, by way of explication, "Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, I am the door of the ſheep." I am not only the door, by which the ſhepherds muſt enter, but I am alſo the door of the ſheep: it is by me that men enter into the ſpiritual incloſure of the church. "All that ever came before me: all thoſe, who in former times aſſumed the characters of teachers of religion, without commiſſion from me, are "thieves and robbers; but the ſheep did not hear them." *John* x. 8.

"I am the door," through which alone any one can come acceptably unto God. "By me, if any man enter in, he ſhall be ſaved, and go in and out, and find paſture." If any man believeth on me, he ſhall become a true member of the church of God upon earth, and ſhall, from time to time, receive ſuch inſtructions as ſhall nouriſh his ſoul unto eternal life. Our bleſſed

bleſſed Saviour ſeems to change the image, in the laſt particular; and, inſtead of the outer court of the temple, where the ſheep were kept, repreſented an incloſure, where cattle were fed.

"The thief cometh not, but for to ſteal, and to kill, and to deſtroy; I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." *John* x. 9. You may eaſily know that I am neither a thief nor a robber, by conſidering that the intention of ſuch is only to ſteal, to kill, and to deſtroy the flock. They aſſume the characters of teachers, who have received their commiſſions from heaven, for no other reaſon than to promote their own intereſt, at the expence of the ſouls of men: but I am come merely to give you life, and even much more abundantly than it was given by Moſes, in the diſpenſation of the law.

Nor am I an hireling ſhepherd, appointed by the owner to take care of the flock; I am the good ſhepherd, promiſed by the prophets; the true proprietor of the ſheep. This is ſufficiently evident from my laying down my life for the ſafety of the flock. Whereas an hireling, who propoſes nothing but his own intereſt, when he ſees the wolf approaching, deſerts the ſheep; his whole care is for his own ſafety, and therefore he will not expoſe himſelf to any danger on their account; ſo that the wolf, without reſiſtance, tears ſome to pieces, and diſperſes the reſt. "I am the good ſhepherd: the good ſhepherd giveth his life for the ſheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the ſhepherd, whoſe own the ſheep are not, ſeeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the ſheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and ſcattereth the ſheep. The hireling fleeth, becauſe he is an hireling, and careth not for the ſheep." *John* x. 11, 12, 13

And as I am the good ſhepherd, and ſo earneſt in tending them, ſo I know every particular ſheep, am able to claim it, in whoſe poſſeſſion ſoever it be, and know every thing relating to the ſheep. I know the circumſtances wherein they are placed, am well acquainted with their wants, and can judge what aſſiſtance they ſtand in need of. Beſides, I love them all with the greateſt ſincerity, and approve of their obedience to me, becauſe, though it be imperfect, it is ſincere. For they have juſt notions of my dignity and character: they know that I am their ſhepherd and Saviour ſent from God: and that I am able to feed them with knowledge;

knowledge; deliver them from the punishment of sin, and bestow on them eternal life, and procure them a place in the blissful mansions of my Father's kingdom. "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine." *John* x. 14.

And this mutual knowledge and love of each other is like that subsisting between me and my Father. "As the father knoweth me, even so know I the father: and I lay down my life for the sheep." *John* x. 15.

I will give a convincing proof of the love I bear the sheep: I will lay down my life for them: an instance of regard that will never be given by any hireling.

But I have other sheep, besides these of the seed of Abraham; numbers of my flock are among the Gentiles. These also I must bring into my church, and they must cheerfully submit to my laws. There shall be then but one visible church, they shall know me, shall distinguish my voice from that of a stranger, and though consisting of Jews and Gentiles, yet shall they have but one shepherd to feed and govern them: for the middle wall of the partition shall be broken down. "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." *John* x. 16.

And because I lay down my life to save the world, therefore my heavenly Father loveth me. But tho' I lay down my life, I will take it again; for I will in due time rise from the dead. I do not, however, either lay down my life, or rise from the dead, without the appointment of the Almighty. I act in both according to the divine wisdom, and agreeable to the will of my heavenly Father, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." *John* x. 17, 18.

Various were the effects produced by this discourse, upon the minds of the Jews. Some of them cried out that he was mad, or possessed with a devil, and that it was the highest folly to hear him; while others, who judged more impartially of him and his doctrine, declared, that his discourses were not those of a lunatic, nor his miracles the works of a devil; asking those who were

enemies to Jeſus, if they imagined any devil was able to confer the faculty of ſight on one that was born blind? "There was a diviſion therefore again, among the Jews for theſe ſayings. And many of them ſaid, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others ſaid, Theſe are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?" *John* x. 19, 20, 21.

Soon after, as Jeſus was ſtanding in Solomon's porch, the Jews came to him, deſiring that he would tell them plainly whether he was the expected Meſſiah, or not? But Jeſus, knowing that they did not aſk this queſtion for information, but to gain an opportunity of accuſing him to the Romans, as a ſeditious perſon, who endeavoured to deceive the people, by pretending to be the great Son of David, promiſed by the prophets, in order to uſurp the kingdom, told them, that they muſt form a judgment of him from his actions. "I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witneſs of me.—But ye believe not, becauſe ye are not of my ſheep, as I ſaid unto you." *John* x. 25, 26. Your unbelief is the effect of your attachment to this world, being unwilling to receive the doctrine of the kingdom of heaven: becauſe you muſt then renounce all your fond hopes of temporal power and advantages. But, on the contrary, thoſe who are of a meek and humble diſpoſition, and their minds free from worldly paſſions, eaſily perceive the truth of my doctrine and miracles, and conſequently are readily diſpoſed to become my diſciples. Nor ſhall ſuch perſons loſe their reward; for I will willingly receive them, and make them partakers of eternal life in my Father's kingdom. And however aſſiduous malicious men may be, in endeavouring to hinder men from believing on me, they ſhall never be able to effect their purpoſe, though aſſiſted by all the powers of darkneſs. For my heavenly Father, who hath given them to me is far greater than them all: nor is any able to contend with him: and this powerful, this Almighty Being and I are one in power. "My ſheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life; and they ſhall never periſh, neither ſhall any pluck them out of my hand. "My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's

ther's hand. I and my Father are one." *John* x. 27, &c.

The Jews were so incensed at this declaration, which they considered as blasphemous, that they took up stones to cast at him, in conformity to the law, which commands all blasphemers to be stoned. But Jesus asked them, which of the beneficent miracles he had wrought, in confirmation of his mission, deserved such treatment? "Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?" As if he had said, I have fed the hungry in the desart, I have healed the lame, I have cleansed the lepers, I have cured the sick, I have given sight to the blind, I have cast out devils, and I have raised the dead: for which of these works are ye going to stone me? Do these miracles indicate that the author of them is an impostor? Or can you be so stupid to think that the Almighty would suffer any person to perform such works, with no other intention than to deceive the human race? The Jews answered, We are far from thinking that thou deservest punishment for any good work thou hast done in favour of the afflicted and distressed: the punishment is intended to chastise thee for thy blasphemous speeches; for thou, though a weak mortal, the being of a day, like ourselves, arrogantly assumest the power and majesty of the Most High, and by claiming the incommunicable attributes of the Deity, makest thyself God. "For a good work we stone thee not: but for blasphemy, and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God." *John* x. 33.

Jesus replied, have not the scriptures expressly called those *gods*, and the *sons of God*, who were commissioned to govern God's people, on account of their high office, and the inspiration of the Spirit, which was, though sparingly, bestowed upon them? Can you, therefore, impute to that person whom the Almighty hath sanctified and sent into the world to save lost mankind, and pay the price of redemption for all the sons of men; can you, I say, impute blasphemy unto him, for taking on himself the title of the Son of God? If my own assertion be not sufficient to convince you of my personal dignity, you must surely think that the many miracles I have wrought abundantly prove that they are the works of the Most High, as Omnipotence alone could perform them; and, therefore, that the Father and I are so united, that whatever I say or do,

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is approved of by the Almighty. "Is it not written in your law, I ſaid, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, upon whom the word of God came, and the ſcripture cannot be broken, ſay ye of him, whom the Father hath ſanctified, and ſent into the world, Thou blaſphemeſt; becauſe I ſaid, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him." *John* x. 34, &c.

But this reply, inſtead of ſatisfying the Jews, rather tended to enrage them the more: and Jeſus ſeeing it was of no conſequence to reaſon with ſo head-ſtrong a people, rendered himſelf inviſible, and by that means eſcaped from them.—"Therefore they ſought again to take him: but he eſcaped out of their hands." *John* x. 39.

The feaſt of the dedication being now over, Jeſus departed from Jeruſalem, and retired into the parts of Perea beyond Jordan. Here his miniſtry was attended with great ſucceſs; for the inhabitants of the country, remembering what had been told them, by John the Baptiſt, concerning Jeſus, and being ſenſible that the doctrine and miracles of our bleſſed Saviour were fully equal to what the Baptiſt had foretold, firmly believed him to be the Meſſiah.

According to this ſuppoſition, which ſeems the moſt agreeable to reaſon, the inhabitants of theſe countries enjoyed the doctrine and miracles of the Son of God for a very conſiderable time. But however this be, the Evangeliſt tells us, that while he was executing his miniſtry beyond Jordan, he happened to pray publicly with ſuch fervency, that one of his diſciples, who was exceedingly affected, both with the matter and manner of his addreſs, begged he would teach them to pray. "And it came to paſs, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceaſed one of his diſciples ſaid unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John alſo taught his diſciples." *Luke* xi. 1.

Soon after our bleſſed Saviour happened to caſt out a devil, when ſome, who were preſent, aſcribed the miracle to Beelzebub; "And he was caſting out a devil, and it was dumb: and it came to paſs, when the devil was gone out, the dumb ſpake; and the people wondered. But ſome of them ſaid he caſteth out devils thro' Beelzebub, the chief of the devils." *Luke* xi. 14, 15. However ſtrange this

this argument may ſeem, and however weak and abſurd it muſt appear to impartial judges, yet it had a conſiderable effect on illiterate perſons, eſpecially on thoſe whoſe prejudices and intereſts it favoured. The Phariſees pretended, that as Jeſus had all along been at great pains to oppoſe the traditions which moſt of the teachers of that age conſidered as the eſſentials of religion, and the principal branches of piety, they concluded that he muſt be a very wicked perſon.

They alſo ſuppoſed, that a falſe prophet had the power of working ſigns and wonders; and thence concluded, that our Saviour performed all his miracles by the aſſiſtance of evil ſpirits, with an intention to turn the people from the worſhip of the true God.

Another pretended reaſon for aſcribing his miracles to evil ſpirits was, that the demons themſelves, when they departed out of the perſons poſſeſſed, honoured him with the title of the Meſſiah. Theſe arguments, though ſo evidently founded on falſhood, contributed largely to the infidelity of the Jews, and however we may be ſurpriſed that ſuch weak reaſons ſhould have any effect, conſidering what multitudes were witneſſes of the many miracles the bleſſed Jeſus performed on the ſick of all ſorts, on the blind, the deaf, the dumb, the maimed, the lame, on paralytics, lunatics, demoniacs, and other miſerable objects; nay, on the dead, whom he raiſed again to life; on the winds and the ſeas: in a word, on every part of nature; yet experience hath abundantly convinced us, that theſe, and their own ſuperſtitious opinions, fixed that headſtrong people in their infidelity.

Though part of the multitude were content with aſcribing this miracle to the power of evil ſpirits, others went ſtill farther, deſiring him to prove himſelf the Meſſiah, by giving them a ſign from heaven. But Jeſus, knowing their thoughts, refuſed to grant them this requeſt: telling them, that they were a wicked race of mortals, and diſcovered a very perverſe diſpoſition, by ſeeking, after ſo many miracles had been performed, a ſign from heaven; and therefore, that no greater ſign ſhould be given them than the ſign of the prophet Jonas. "This is an evil generation: they ſeek a ſign; and there ſhall no ſign be given it, but the ſign of Jonas the prophet."—*Luke* xi. 29.

"No man (added the Saviour of

the world) when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it into a ſecret place, neither under a buſhel, but on a candleſtick, that they which come in may ſee the light." No man, endured with the ſpirit of God, concealeth the bleſſed gift; but holdeth forth the glorious doctrines of ſalvation, as it were like a candle, that the light of the ſame may ſhine upon the ſouls of men, who hear them. "The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is ſingle, thy whole body alſo is full of light: but when thine eye is evil, thy body alſo is full of darkneſs. Take heed therefore, that the light which is in thee be not darkneſs." *Luke* xi. 34. &c. Take care, therefore, that thy ſoul is ſo completely enlightened by the ſpirit, that the emanations of its light be not in the leaſt interrupted by any evil paſſion, or affection; that all the faculties of the ſoul may be as much enlightened and aſſiſted, as the members of the body are by the bright ſhining of a candle. "If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole ſhall be full of light, as when the bright ſhining of a candle doth give thee light." *Luke* xi. 36.

Thus did our bleſſed Saviour prove the truth of his miſſion, againſt the cavils and ſophiſtical reaſoning of his malicious enemies. And when he had done ſpeaking, one of the Phariſees preſent, deſired he would dine with him. The Redeemer of mankind accepting the invitation, though probably given with an inſidious deſign, accompanied the Phariſee to his houſe, and ſat down to meat, but without performing the ceremony of waſhing, obſerved by all the other gueſts.

An omiſſion of this kind could not fail of ſurprizing the Phariſee, as he had thereby ſhewn an open contempt of their traditions. Jeſus, who well knew the thoughts of this bigotted Phariſee, ſaid to him, Your ſect are remarkably careful to keep every thing clean that touches your food, leſt, by eating it, your body ſhould be polluted; but you take no pains to clean your minds from the pollutions of rapine, covetouſneſs and wickedneſs. You muſt ſurely be convinced, that he who created the body formed alſo the ſoul; and can you imagine, that the Almighty who requires purity of body, becauſe it is the work of his hands, will not alſo inſiſt upon a greater purity of ſoul, which is undoubtedly the far nobler part of human nature? Inſtead,

ſtead, therefore, of that ſcrupulous ſolicitude of waſhing your hands, when ye ſit down to meat, ye ſhould be careful to apply yourſelves to the great duty of charity; a duty that will render it impoſſible for any external things to defile you, but will be at all times acceptable to your Maker. "Now do ye Phariſees make clean the outſide of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedneſs. Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without, make that which is within alſo? but rather give alms of ſuch things as ye have, and, behold, all things are clean unto you." *Luke* xi. 39, &c.

But the Phariſees, obſtinate and perverſe, withſtood every means made uſe of by the benign Redeemer of mankind to conquer their prejudices, and bring them to the knowledge of the truth; and therefore our bleſſed Saviour treated them, on this occaſion, with a kind and wholeſome ſeverity, denouncing againſt them the moſt dreadful woes, for regarding ſo zealouſly the ceremonial parts of religion, and at the ſame time utterly neglecting the very precepts of their own religion.—"Wo unto you, Phariſees, for ye tithe mint and rue, and all manner of herbs, and paſs over judgment and the love of God: thoſe ought ye to have done and not to leave the other undone. Wo unto you, Phariſees, for ye love the uppermoſt ſeats in the ſynagogues, and greetings in the markets. Wo unto you, ſcribes and phariſees, hypocrites: for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them." *Luke* xi. 42, &c.

A certain lawyer, who ſat at the table, thinking that his rebuke, tho', levelled principally againſt the ſcribes and phariſees, affected his order alſo, was greatly diſpleaſed. But Jeſus, who had never any regard to the perſons of men, deſpiſed his reſentment, and told him freely, what he thought of their character. "Wo unto you alſo, ye lawyers; for, ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourſelves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers." *Luke* xi. 46. You pervert in a very erroneous manner, the interpretation of ſcripture, for no other reaſon than to favour the tradition of the elders, and by that means lay ſo heavy a burden on the ſhoulders of the deſcendants of Jacob, that neither you nor they will touch with one of your fingers.

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The bleſſed Jeſus alſo condemned them for building the ſepulchre of the prophets, whom their fathers had murdered; becauſe they did not do it from the reſpect which they had for the memory of theſe holy men, but from a ſecret approbation of their father's actions; as too evidently appeared from their whole conduct. "Wo unto you: for ye build the ſepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witneſs that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their ſepulchres. Therefore alſo, ſaid the wiſdom of God, I will ſend them prophets and apoſtles, and ſome of them they ſhall ſlay and perſecute: that the blood of all the prophets, which was ſhed from the foundation of the world, might be required of this generation: from the blood of Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, which periſhed between the altar and the temple; verily, I ſay unto you, It ſhall be required of this generation." *Luke* xi. 47, &c.

Our Lord alſo reproved the lawyers for filling the minds of the people with notions founded on wrong interpretations of ſcripture, whereby they were prejudiced againſt the goſpel; not being contented with rejecting it themſelves, but took care to hinder others from receiving it.—"Wo unto you lawyers: for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye enter not in yourſelves, and them that were entering in ye hinder." *Luke* xi. 52.

Such honeſt reprimands highly provoked the Phariſee and his gueſts. They were conſcious of being guilty of the crimes laid to their charge, but unwilling the people ſhould think them guilty: and therefore, out of revenge, urged him to ſpeak on a variety of topics, hoping they ſhould be able, by thoſe means, to find occaſion of rendering him obnoxious, either to the government, or the multitude. "And as he ſaid theſe things unto them, the Scribes and the Phariſees began to urge him vehemently, and to provoke him to ſpeak of many things; laying wait for him, and ſeeking to catch ſomething out of his mouth, that they might accuſe him." Luke xi. 53, 54.

CHAP. XXI.

Explanation of the Origin and Opinions of the different Sects amongſt the Jews. Our Lord teaches the Multitude by plain Diſcourſe, and alſo by Parable.

HAving undertaken to write the life of our bleſſed Lord and Saviour

Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, we cannot omit a diſtinct account of the different ſects of the Jews, a people with whom he was moſt intimately concerned, both as an elucidation of many circumſtances, as well as verification of many things, foretold concerning the Meſſiah.

Joſephus reckons four principal ſects among the Jews; namely, the Phariſees, the Sadducees, called alſo the Herodians, the Eſſenians, and the Galileans. The Evangeliſts mention only two, the Phariſees and Sadducees.

The riſe of the Phariſees is unknown. They claim, indeed, the celebrated Hillel for their founder, as he is by ſome ſuppoſed to have lived during the pontificate of Jonathan, about an hundred and fifty years before the birth of Chriſt: but others, with more reaſon, ſuppoſe that he was cotemporary with the famous Someas, who lived about the time of Herod, long before whom the ſect of the Phariſees was in high repute. It is therefore probable, that they claim Hillel rather as an ornament, than as the author of their ſect.

One of the moſt famous tenets of the Phariſees was that of an oral tradition handed down from Moſes, and to which they attributed the ſame divine authority as to the ſacred books. This being ſtrenuouſly oppoſed by the Sadducees and Samaritans, rendered theſe equally deteſted by them. But none more incurred their hatred than the bleſſed Jeſus, who embraced every occaſion of reproving them, for the unjuſtifiable preference they gave this pretended tradition to the written word of God, and for condemning thoſe as apoſtates worthy of death who did not pay the ſame, or even a greater regard to the former than to the latter.

Another tenet they embraced, in oppoſition to the Sadducees, was, that of the exiſtence of angels, the immortality of the ſoul, the reſurrection of the dead, and future rewards. But with regard to the laſt, they excluded all who were notoriouſly wicked from having any ſhare in the pleaſures of eternity; ſuppoſing, that as ſoon as death had put a period to their exiſtence, their ſouls were conveyed into everlaſting puniſhments.

A third tenet was, that all things were ſubject to fate, or, as ſome expreſſed it, to the heavens, except the fear of God. It is not eaſy to conceive what they meant by this:

Joſephus, indeed, will have it, That they deſigned to reconcile the fatality or predeſtination of the Eſſenians, with the free-will of the Sadducees.

If ſo, this is not the only abſurdity, or even contradiction, which they held: but a certain learned prelate ſeems to have proved, that they attributed all to fate, or to that chain of cauſes to which the Creator had ſubjected all things from the beginning; among which the influence of the heavenly bodies was conſidered as the principal. This ſeems to be hinted at by St. James, in the beginning of his epiſtle to new converts, where he explodes that phariſaical leaven by the moſt beautiful oppoſition of the immutability of God, the giver of all good, to the mutability of the planets, which, according to that notion, muſt neceſſarily vary their aſpects from a malign to a benelovent one, and the contrary, even by their natural motions and change of poſition. This tenet of the Phariſees was, therefore, a new ſource of diſlike to the doctrines delivered by the bleſſed Jeſus, as theſe affirm that men are the authors of their own unbelief, diſobedience, and obſtinacy; and, conſequently, anſwerable for that, and all the train of evils theſe vices draw after them.

But the moſt diſtinguiſhed character of the Phariſees, and that which rendered them moſt obnoxious to the juſt cenſures of our bleſſed Saviour, was, their ſupererogatory attachment to the ceremonial law, their frequent waſhings, faſtings, and prayings, their giving alms publicly, ſeeking for proſelytes, ſcrupulous tythings, affected gravity of dreſs, geſture, and mortified looks: their building the tombs of the prophets, to tell the world they were more righteous than their anceſtors, who murdered them, though they were themſelves plotting the death of one greater than all the prophets; their over ſcrupulous obſervance of the ſabbath, to the excluſion of the works of the greateſt charity, and many other of the like nature; while they were wholly negligent of the moral and eternal law of mercy and juſtice; of charity, humility, and the like indiſpenſible virtues.

The very beſt of them contented themſelves with abſtaining from the actual committing any ſinful act, while they indulged themſelves in the moſt wicked thoughts and deſires. Nay, ſome, more hardened in their vices, made no ſcruple not only

only of coveting but deſtroying poor widows houſes; of committing the vileſt oppreſſions, injuſtices, and cruelties, and of encouraging theſe enormities in their diſciples, under the ſpecious cloak of religion and ſanctity. Well, therefore, might the great Redeemer of mankind compare them to whited ſepulchres, beautiful indeed without, but within full of rottenneſs and corruption.

The laſt erroneous opinion we ſhall mention of the Phariſees, common, indeed to all the other ſects, but more exactly conformable to their haughty, rapacious, and cruel temper, was, their expectation of a glorious, a conquering Meſſiah, who was to bring the whole world under the Jewiſh yoke; ſo that there was ſcarce an inhabitant of Jeruſalem, however mean, that did not expect to be made a governor of ſome opulent province under that wonderful prince. How unlikely was it, then, that the preaching of the meek, the humble Jeſus, whoſe doctrine breathed nothing but humility, peace, ſincerity, contempt of the world, and univerſal love and beneficence, ſhould ever be reliſhed by that proud, that covetous, that hypocritical ſect, or even by the reſt of the populace, while theſe, their teachers, ſo ſtrenuouſly oppoſed it?

The ſect of the Sadducees is ſaid to have been founded by one Saddoc, a diſciple of Antigonus of Socho. Their chief tenet was, that our ſerving God ought to be be free either from ſlaviſh fear of puniſhment, or from ſelfiſh hope of reward; that it ſhould be diſintereſted, and flow only from the pure love and fear of the Supreme Being. They added, that God was the only immaterial being; in conſequence of which, they denied the exiſtence of angels, or any ſpiritual ſubſtances, except the Almighty himſelf. It is therefore no wonder, that the Sadducees ſhould take every opportunity of oppoſing and ridiculing the doctrine of the reſurrection.

Another of their tenets, equally oppoſite to the Phariſees, and to the doctrine of Chriſt, was, that man was conſtituted abſolute maſter of all his actions, and ſtood in no need of any aſſiſtance to chuſe or act: for this reaſon they were always very ſevere in their ſentences, when they ſat as judges. They rejected all the pretended oral traditions of the Phariſees, admitting only the texts of the ſacred books, and preferred thoſe of Moſes to all the reſt of the inſpired writings.

They

They are charged with ſome other erroneous tenets, by Joſephus and the Talmudiſts; but thoſe already mentioned are abundantly ſufficient for the purpoſe. The notion of a future life, univerſal judgment, eternal rewards and puniſhments to men, whom a contrary doctrine had long ſoothed into luxury, and an overgrown fondneſs for temporal happineſs, which they conſidered as the only reward for their obedience, muſt, of neceſſity, appear ſtrange and frightful; and as ſuch could not fail of meeting with the ſtrongeſt oppoſition from them: eſpecially if we add what Joſephus obſerves, that they were in general men of the greateſt quality and opulence, and conſequently too apt to prefer the pleaſures and grandeur of this life to thoſe of another.

The ſect of the Galileans or Gaulonites, ſo called from Judas the Galilean or Gaulonite, appeared ſoon after the baniſhment of Archelaus, when his territories were made a Roman province, and the government given to Coponius. For the Jews, conſidering this as an open attempt to reduce them to ſlavery, Judas took advantage of their diſcontent; and to ripen them for an inſurrection, Auguſtus furniſhed them with a plauſible pretence, by iſſuing, about this time, an edict for ſurveying the whole province of Syria, and laying on it a proportional tax.—Judas, therefore, who was a man of uncommon ambition, took occaſion from this incident to diſplay all his eloquence, in order to convince the Jews, that ſuch a ſubmiſſion was nothing leſs than baſe idolatry, and placing men on a level with the God of Jacob, who was the only Lord and Sovereign that could challenge their obedience and ſubjection. The party which he drew after him became in a ſhort time ſo conſiderable, that they threw every thing into confuſion, laid the foundation for thoſe frightful conſequences that enſued, and which did not end but with the deſtruction of Jeruſalem.

The Eſſenians, though not mentioned by the Evangeliſts, made a very conſiderable ſect among the Jews, and are highly celebrated by Joſephus, Philo, Pliny, and ſeveral Chriſtian writers, both ancient and modern.

It is impoſſible to trace their origin, or even the etymology of their name. This however is certain, that they were ſettled in Judea in the time of Jonathan, the brother and ſucceſſor of Judas Macabeus, about

about an hundred and fifty years before Chriſt.

The Eſſenians diſtinguiſhed themſelves by their rules and manner of life into two claſſes; the laborious, and the contemplative. The former divided their time between prayer and labour; ſuch as the exerciſe of ſome handicraft, or the cultivation of ſome particular ſpot of ground, where they planted and ſowed ſuch roots, corn, &c. as ſerved for their food; and the latter, between prayer, contemplation, and ſtudy. In this laſt they confined themſelves to the ſacred books and morality, without troubling themſelves with any other branch of philoſophy.

Both the contemplative and laborious had their ſynagogues, their ſtated hours for prayer, for reading and expounding the ſacred books. The latter was always performed by their elders, who were ſeated at the upper end of the ſynagogue, according to their ſeniority; while the younger, who were permitted to read the leſſons, were placed at the lower. Their expoſitions were generally of the allegorical kind, in which they ſeem to have excelled all their Jewiſh brethren. But they paid the greateſt regard to the five books of Moſes, and conſidered that law-giver as the head of all the inſpired pen-men: they even condemned to immediate death whoever ſpoke diſreſpectfully either of him or his writings. Upon this account they ſtudied, read and expounded him more than all the reſt, and ſeem to have drawn their religion chiefly from the Pentateuch. The doctrines and expoſitions of the elders were received with implicit faith, and in their practice they conformed with an entire ſubmiſſion to all their ſect.

With reſpect to their faith, they believed the exiſtence of angels, the immortality of the ſoul, and a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, like the Phariſees; but ſeem to have had no notion of the reſurrection. They conſidered the ſouls of men as compoſed of a moſt ſubtle æther, which immediately after their ſeparation from the body, or from the cage or priſon, as they affected to call it, were adjudged to a place of endleſs happineſs or miſery: that the good took their flight over the ocean, into ſome warm or delightful regions prepared for them, while the wicked were conveyed to ſome cold and intemperate climates, where they were left to groan under an inexpreſſible weight of miſery. They

were likewiſe entirely averſe to the Sadducean doctrine of free will, attributing all to an eternal fatality, or chain of cauſes, little different from that of Spinoſa. They were averſe to all kinds of oaths; affirming, that a man's life ought to be ſuch, that he may be credited without them. The contemplative ſort placed the excellency of their meditative life in raiſing their minds ſo far above the earth, as to be able to ſee from thence what was done in heaven: when they had attained this degree of excellency, they acquired the character of prophets.

In their practiſe they excelled all the other ſects in auſterity. If we may credit Philo, it was a fundamental maxim with them, upon their entrance into the contemplative life, to renounce the world, and to divide among their friends and relations their properties and eſtates. They never eat till after ſun-ſet, and the beſt of their food was coarſe bread, a little ſalt, and a few ſtomachic herbs. Their cloathing was made of coarſe wool, plain but white: they condemned all ſorts of unctions and perfumes as luxurious and effeminate. Their beds were hard, and their ſleep ſhort. Their heads or ſuperiors were generally choſen according to ſeniority, unleſs there ſtarted up among the brotherhood ſome more conſpicuous for learning, piety, or prophetic ſpirit. Some of them, indeed, were ſo contemplative, that they never ſtirred out of their cell, or even looked out of their window during the whole week, ſpending their time in reading the ſacred books, and writing comments upon them. On the ſabbath-day they repaired to their ſynagogues early in the morning, and continued there the whole day in prayers, ſinging of pſalms, or expounding the ſacred books.

Having endeavoured to explain the origin and tenets of the ſeveral ſects among the Jews, we now return to the hiſtory of our bleſſed Saviour, whom we left preaching in the country beyond Jordan, where he was ſurrounded by an innumerable multitude of people.

In the audience of this vaſt aſſembly, he gave his diſciples, in general, a charge to beware of the leaven of the Phariſees, namely, hypocriſy; becauſe all their actions would be brought to light, either in this world, or in that which is to come; and therefore exhorted them to be careful never to do any thing which could not bear the light, but

to let the whole of their behaviour be honeſt, juſt, and good. "Beware ye of the leaven of the Phariſees, which is hypocriſy. For there is nothing covered, that ſhall not be revealed, neither hid, that ſhall not be known. Therefore whatſoever ye have ſpoken in darkneſs ſhall be heard in the light; and that which ye have ſpoken in the ear in cloſets ſhall be proclaimed upon the houſe-tops." *Luke* xii. 1, 2, 3.

This argument againſt hypocriſy, he improved as a reaſon for their acquiring another quality, which would much better ſerve all the ends they could propoſe; namely, an undaunted reſolution in the performance of their duty, founded on a firm confidence in God, who would bring to light the moſt ſecret word and thought, publicly condemn the wicked, and juſtify his faithful ſervants and children.

Fear not, ſaid he, the malice of the human race: it can extend no farther than the deſtruction of the body; your ſoul may bid defiance to their impotent race. But dread the diſpleaſure of that Almighty Being, who, after he has deſtroyed the body, is able to confine the ſoul in eternal torments. Remember all things are in his power, and that nothing happens without his permiſſion; he provides for the meaneſt of his creatures, and ſurely you may think yourſelves under his protection, who numbers the very hairs of your head; nor can your enemies touch one of them without his permiſſion. "And I ſay unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you, whom ye ſhall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to caſt into hell; yea, I ſay unto you, Fear him. Are not five ſparrows ſold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? but even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; ye are of more value than many ſparrows." *Luke* xii. 4, &c.

Our Lord, to animate his followers to a perſeverance, admoniſhes them to look forward unto the general judgment, when he would acknowledge them as his ſervants, provided they acknowledged him in this world as their maſter, and chearfully and conſtantly obeyed his commands. But if they were aſhamed of him, and his doctrine, before the ſons of men, he would diſown them before the celeſtial hoſt. And that

thoſe

thoſe who reviled the ſpirit, by whom they performed their miracles, ſhould be puniſhed by the Almighty, in proportion to the malignity of their crime, which is greater than that of reviling the Son of God himſelf; becauſe it will be impoſſible for them to repent. "Alſo I ſay unto you, Whoſoever ſhall confeſs me before men, him ſhall the Son of man alſo confeſs before the angels of God. But he that denieth me before men, ſhall be denied before the angels of God. And whoſoever ſhall ſpeak a word againſt the Son of man, it ſhall be forgiven him: but unto him that blaſphemeth the Holy Ghoſt, it ſhall not be forgiven." Luke xii. 8, &c.

He alſo cautioned his diſciples not to be perplexed with regard to an anſwer, when they ſhould be brought before the rulers of the people, becauſe they ſhould be inſpired by the Spirit of God. "And when they bring you unto the ſynagogues, and unto Magiſtrates and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye ſhall anſwer, or what ye ſhall ſay. For the Holy Ghoſt ſhall teach you in the ſame hour what ye ought to ſay." *Luke* xii. 11, 12.

While our bleſſed Saviour was delivering theſe exhortations to his diſciples, a certain perſon among the multitude begged him, that he would interpoſe his authority with his brother, in order to oblige him to divide their paternal inheritance between them: but as this deciſion properly belonged to the magiſtrates, our Saviour, who came into the world to redeem the ſouls of mankind, and to purchaſe for them an eternal, not a temporal inheritance, declined the office. He however embraced the opportunity of giving his hearers the moſt ſolemn caution againſt covetouſneſs; declaring, that neither the length nor happineſs of human life had any dependance on the largeneſs of poſſeſſions. "Take heed, and beware of covetouſneſs; for a man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth." *Luke* xii. 15.

To excite their negligence of the things of this life, he placed before them in the ſtrongeſt light an example of the bewitching influence of wealth, in the parable of the rich glutton, who was cut off in the midſt of his projects, and became a remarkable example of the folly of amaſſing the goods of this life without having any regard to the commands of the Almighty.——This wretched man, forgetting his own mortality, made preparations for a long

long and luxurious life, pleasing himself with the thought of possessing an inexhaustable fund of sensual enjoyments. But, alas, while he was providing repositories for his riches, the inexorable king of terrors seized him, and that very night hurried him before the awful tribunal of Omnipotence. "And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say unto my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall these things be, which thou hast provided." *Luke* xii. 16, &c.

How solemn the appeal! while he lay waking on his bed in anxious solitude, what he should do with his abundance; while his heart was dilated with the hopes of a variety of pleasures and indulgences; in that very moment the golden dream vanishes at once; all his thoughts perish, and, in their stead, a horrid account stares him in the face; a scene of judgment presents itself to his terrified imagination! a dark night of horror, in an instant, overwhelms that soul to which he had promised so much ease, so much pleasure; and instead of ease, instead of eating, drinking, and making merry, eternal tortures, unspeakable thirst, weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, must be the portion of this miserable soul to all eternity!

"So is he (added our blessed Saviour) that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God." Thus shall he be taken away from all his soul desireth; thus shall he be torn from all his temporal prospects and pleasures. None of his beloved enjoyments shall follow him, naked as he came shall he depart out of the world, nor shall all his riches be able to procure him the least comfort or respite in these scenes of terror. How should this reflection awaken us to a due care of our immortal part! how would it alarm us, when planning fancied schemes of worldly pleasures, without the least regard to the great Disposer of all events! Without his assistance, all

our promiſes of ſecurity are vain and fooliſh; he will ſurely render all our labours abortive; andi n a moment, when we think ourſelves ſecure, the ſummons ſhall arrive, ſwift as the forky lightning's flaſh, convey us to the boundleſs regions of eternity, and preſent us, clothed in all our guilt, before the juſt, the mighty Author of our being!

This awakening parable exhibits a ſtriking picture of the egregious folly of thoſe, who live only for themſelves, laying up treaſures for ſenſual enjoyments, but neglect the grace of God and the immenſe treaſure of ſalvation laid up in Jeſus Chriſt.

Having ſpoken this parable, our Lord proceeded to caution his diſciples againſt anxious cares for the things of this world; from a conſideration, that the care of God's providence extends to every part of the creation. The fowls of heaven are fed by his bounty, and the lilies that adorn the vallies are ſupplied with rain from the clouds of heaven: if, therefore, ſaid the bleſſed Jeſus, Omnipotence ſo carefully provides for the inferior parts of the creation, the children of men have ſurely reaſon to rely on his bounty, and depend for ſubſiſtance on his merciful hand. He added, that as God had deſtined them to everlaſting happineſs in a future life, he would ſurely provide for them all the neceſſaries of the preſent. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleaſure to give you the kingdom." At the ſame time he gave his diſciples another precept, peculiarly calculated for thoſe times in which the profeſſion of the goſpel expoſed men to the loſs of their ſubſtance. "Sell all that ye have, and give alms: provide yourſelves bags which wax not old, a treaſure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth: for where your treaſure is, there will your heart be alſo." *Luke* xii. 33, 34.

Having thus recommended to them the diſengagement of their affections from the things of this world, he exhorted them to labour after improvement in grace. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourſelves like unto men that wait for the Lord, when ye ſhall return from the wedding, that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately." *Luke* xii. 35, 36.

This was ſpoken in alluſion to the cuſtoms of the Eaſt, where anciently great

great entertainments were made in the evening; and on theſe occaſions ſervants demonſtrated their diligence by watching, and keeping their loins girded, and their lamps burning, that they might be ready, on the firſt knock of their maſter, to open the door. Nor was it uncommon for the maſter, in order to reward ſuch a ſervant, to order him a refreſhment, and ſometimes even give it him with his own hand. In alluſion to which cuſtom, our bleſſed Saviour added; "Bleſſed are thoſe ſervants, whom the Lord, when he cometh, ſhall find watching. Verily, I ſay unto you, that he ſhall gird himſelf, and make them to ſit down to meat, and will come forth and ſerve them." *Luke* xii. 37.

Our Saviour enforced this conſtant watchfulneſs. and habitual preparation, by reminding them of the uncertainty of his coming; telling his diſciples, that as every maſter of a family, if he knew the coming of the thief, would make ſome preparation againſt a ſurprize, ſo it would be highly requiſite for them to make ſome preparation for the approach of their Maſter, and be always ready to receive him, as the time of his coming was uncertain.

CHAP. XXII.

Our Lord reproves the Ignorance of the People in not underſtanding the Signs which preceded his appearance. Pertinently replies to an ignorant Queſtion and Inference concerning the Galileans. Teaches by Parable. Relieves a diſtreſſed Woman; and is warned to depart the Country, in order to eſcape the Reſentment of Herod.

THE Great Preacher of Iſrael having delivered theſe ſalutary admonitons to his diſciples and followers, directed his diſcourſe to the unbelieving crowd. You can, ſaid he, by the ſigns that appear in the ſky, and on the earth, form a judgment of the weather; and why can ye not alſo diſcover the time of the Meſſiah's appearance, by the ſigns which have preceded it?—— "When ye ſee a cloud riſe out of the weſt, ſtraightway ye ſay, there cometh a ſhower; and ſo it is.— And when ye ſee the ſouth wind blow, ye ſay, there will be heat; and it cometh to paſs. Ye hypocrites, ye can diſcern the face of the ſky, and of the earth, but how is it that ye cannot diſcern this time?" *Luke* xii. 54, &c.

The prediction of the Son of Man coming to puniſh the Jews for their rebellion and infidelity, delivered under the ſimilitude of one who cometh ſecretly and unexpectedly to plunder

plunder a houſe, was a loud call to a national repentance. In order, therefore, to improve that prediction, he exhorted them to a ſpeedy reformation; telling them, that the leaſt degree of Reflection would be ſufficient to point out to them the beſt methods they could poſſibly make uſe of for averting the impending judgments of the Almighty; illuſtrating what he had ſaid, by the puniſhments commonly inflicted on the man who refuſes to make reparation for the injuries he has done his neighbour. "When thou goeſt with thine adverſary to the magiſtrate, as thou art in the way, give diligence, that thou mayeſt be delivered from him; leſt he hale thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and the officer caſt thee into priſon. I tell thee, thou ſhalt not depart thence, till thou haſt paid the very laſt mite." *Luke* xii. 58, 59.

Some of his hearers thought proper to confirm this doctrine, by giving what they conſidered as an example of it. "There were preſent at that ſeaſon ſome that told him of the Galileans, whoſe blood Pilate had mingled with their ſacrifices; thinking, that Providence, for ſome extraordinary crime, had ſuffered theſe Galileans to be murdered at the altar.

But our Lord ſhewed them the error of their opinion and inference concerning this point, it being no indication that theſe Galileans were greater ſinners than their countrymen, becauſe they had ſuffered ſo ſevere a calamity, and at the ſame time exhorted them to improve ſuch inſtances of calamity, as incitements to their own repentance; aſſuring them, that if they neglected ſo ſalutary a work, they ſhould all likewiſe periſh. "And Jeſus anſwering, ſaid unto them, Suppoſe ye that theſe Galileans were ſinners above all the Galileans, becauſe they ſuffered ſuch things? I tell you, nay: but, except ye repent, ye ſhall all likewiſe periſh." *Luke* xiii. 2, &c.

He illuſtrated this doctrine, by putting them in mind of the eighteen perſons, on whom the tower of Siloam fell; ſhewing them, by this inſtance, the folly of interpreting the diſpenſations of Providence in that manner; for though this calamity ſeemed to flow immediately from the hand of God, yet, in all probability, it had involved people who were remarkable for their piety and goodneſs. "Or thoſe eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell

fell and ſlew them: think ye that they were ſinners above all men that dwelt in Jeruſalem? I tell you, nay: but, except ye repent, ye ſhall all likewiſe periſh." *Luke* xiii. 4, 5.

To rouſe them from their indolence, and to induce them to ſeek the aid of God's grace and ſpirit, he added the parable of the fig-tree, which the maſter of the vineyard, after finding it three years barren, ordered it to be deſtroyed; but was ſpared one year longer, at the earneſt ſolicitation of the gardener. "A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard, and he came and ſought fruit thereon, and found none. Then ſaid he unto the dreſſer of his vineyard, Behold, theſe three years I come ſeeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he anſwering ſaid unto him, Lord, let it alone this year alſo, till I ſhall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou ſhalt cut it down." *Luke* xiii. 6, &c.

By this parable our bleſſed Saviour repreſented the goodneſs of the Almighty towards the Jews, in chuſing them for his people, giving them the outward diſpenſations of religion, and informing them of the improvements he expected they ſhould make of theſe advantages, and the puniſhments he would inflict upon them, in caſe they ſlighted ſuch benevolent offers. He alſo repreſented by it, in a very beautiful manner, the unbounded mercies of the Almighty in ſparing them at the interceſſion of his Son, and giving them a farther time of trial, and ſtill greater advantages, by the preaching of the bleſſed Jeſus and his apoſtles; concluding with an inſinuation, that if they neglected this laſt opportunity, they ſhould periſh without remedy.

During Jeſus's abode in the country of Perea, he obſerved, while he was teaching in one of the ſynagogues, on the ſabbath-day, a woman, who, during the ſpace of eighteen years, had been unable to ſtand upright. A daughter of Iſrael labouring under ſo terrible a diſorder could not fail of attracting the compaſſion of the Son of God.

He beheld this affecting object, he pitied her deplorable condition, he removed her complaint. She who came into the ſynagogue, bowed down with an infirmity, was by the all-powerful word of the Son of God, reſtored to her natural health, and

returned to her houſe upright and full of vigour.

Such a diſplay of divine power and goodneſs, inſtead of exciting the gratitude, ſo highly offended the Maſter of the ſynagogue, that he openly teſtified his diſpleaſure, and reproved the people as ſabbath-breakers, becauſe they came on that day to be healed. "There are ſix days, (ſaid this ſurly ruler to the people) in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the ſabbath-day." *Luke* xiii. 14.

But our bleſſed Saviour ſoon ſilenced this hypocritical Phariſee, by ſhewing that he had not deviated from their own avowed practice.—They made no ſcruple of looſing their cattle and leading them to water on the ſabbath-day, becauſe the mercy of the action ſufficiently juſtified them for performing it. And ſurely his action of looſing, by a ſingle word, a woman, a rational creature, a daughter of Abraham, that had been bound by an incurable diſtemper, during the tedious interval of eighteen years, was abundantly juſtified; nor could this bigoted ruler have thought otherwiſe, had not his reaſon been blinded by his ſuperſtition. "The Lord then anſwered him, and ſaid, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you, on the ſabbath looſe his ox or his aſs from the ſtall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, theſe eighteen years, be looſed from this bond on the ſabbath-day? And when he had ſaid theſe things, all his adverſaries were aſhamed; and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him." *Luke* xiii. 15, &c.

From this inſtance we may form ſome idea of the pernicious effects of ſuperſtition, which is capable of extinguiſhing reaſon, baniſhing compaſſion, and of eradicating the moſt eſſential principles and feelings of the human breaſt.

Our Lord having reproved the ſuperſtition of the ruler of the ſynagogue, and obſerving the acclamations of the people, he reflected with pleaſure on the reaſon and truth which ſo effectually ſupported his kingdom. For he repeated the parables of the grain of muſtard-ſeed and of the leaven, to ſhew the efficacious operations of the goſpel upon the minds of the children of men, and its rapid progreſs through the world, notwithſtanding all the oppoſition

poſition of its inveterate enemies.

The great Redeemer having now planted the ſeeds of the goſpel in the country of Perea, croſſed the Jordan, and travelled by ſlow journies towards Jeruſalem, preaching the goſpel in every village, and declaring the glad tidings of ſalvation to all the inhabitants of thoſe countries.

While he was thus labouring for the ſalvation of mankind, one of the perſons who accompanied him, aſked him, "Lord, are there few that be ſaved?" In all probability the perſon who propoſed this queſtion had heard the Son of God deſcribe the ſucceſs of the goſpel, by the parables of the muſtard-ſeed and the leaven; and his notions of the kingdom of the Meſſiah, being thoſe that were then entertained by the Jews in general, he meant a temporal ſalvation. But Jeſus, to convince him that he never intended to erect a ſecular kingdom, anſwered the queſtion in a ſpiritual manner, and told him, That a ſmall number only of the Jews would be ſaved; exhorting them to embrace the offers of mercy before it was too late, for that many, after the period of their trial was concluded, and their ſtate finally and irreverſibly determined, ſhould earneſtly deſire theſe benevolent offers, but ſhould be denied their requeſt. "Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate: for many, I ſay unto you, will ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able. When once the Maſter of the houſe is riſen up, and hath ſhut to the door, and ye begin to ſtand without, and to knock at the door, ſaying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he ſhall anſwer, and ſay unto you, I know you not, whence you are." *Luke* xiii. 24, 25. He alſo repeated on this occaſion, what he had before delivered in his famous ſermon on the mount; and what he had obſerved to the multitude in commendation of the Centurion's faith. "Then ſhall ye begin to ſay, We have eaten and drunk in thy preſence, and thou haſt taught in our ſtreets. But he ſhall ſay, I tell you, I know you not whence you are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of teeth, when ye ſhall ſee Abraham, and Iſaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourſelves thruſt out. And they ſhall come from the ea and from the weſt, and from the north, and from the ſouth, and ſhall ſit down in the kingdom of God. And behold, there are laſt which

which ſhall be firſt, and there are firſt which ſhall be laſt." Luke xiii. 26, &c.

Immediately after Jeſus had thus preached the kingdom of God to the multitude, certain of the Phariſees came to him, and told him, that unleſs he departed thence, Herod would deſtroy him: but this concern for his ſafety was altogether feigned, and their real deſign no other, than to intimidate him, hoping by that means to induce him to leave the country, and retire into Judea, where they did not doubt but the chief prieſts would find ſome method of putting him to death. Perhaps Herod himſelf was privy to this meſſage, and deſirous that Jeſus ſhould leave his territories; though the agonies he had ſuffered, on account of John the Baptiſt, hindered him from making uſe of force. That this was really the caſe ſeems evident, from the anſwer our bleſſed Saviour made to the Phariſees. "Go ye (ſaid he, to theſe hypocritical Iſraelites) and tell that fox, Behold, I caſt out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I ſhall be perfected. Nevertheleſs, I muſt walk to-day and to-morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be, that a prophet periſh out of Jeruſalem." *Luke* xiii. 32, 33.

Having given this anſwer to the Phariſees, he reflected on the treatment the prophets had received from the inhabitants of Jeruſalem; pathetically lamented their obſtinacy, and the terrible deſolation that would in a ſhort time overtake them.—"Oh! Jeruſalem, Jeruſalem, which killeſt the prophets, and ſtoneſt them which are ſent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not? Behold, your houſe is left unto you deſolate: and verily I ſay unto you, ye ſhall not ſee me, until the time come, when ye ſhall ſay, Bleſſed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." *Luke* xiii. 34, 35.

CHAP. XXIII.

The bleſſed Jeſus accepts the Phariſee's Invitation a third Time.—Delivers divers Parables repreſenting the Requiſites for Admittance into the Kingdom of God.—The Care of the Redeemer for every one of his People.—The Reception of a penitent Sinner; and the Puniſhment of miſuſing the Benefits of the Goſpel.

OUR Saviour having finiſhed this awful exclamation and prediction, was invited by one of the Phariſees to his houſe. Though he knew that his invitation aroſe not from a generous motive, yet as he never ſhunned any opportunity of doing

doing good, even to his moſt implacable enemies, he accepted it. At his entering the Phariſee's houſe, they placed before him a man that had a dropſy, doubtleſs with an intention to accuſe him for healing on the ſabbath-day; being perſuaded that he would work a miracle, in favour of ſo melancholy an object. Jeſus, who knew the ſecret thought of their hearts, aſked the lawyers and Phariſees, whether it was "lawful to heal on the ſabbath-day?" But they refuſing to give any anſwer to the queſtion, Jeſus laid his hand on the deceaſed perſon, and immediately his complexion returned, his body was reduced to its ordinary dimenſion, and his former health and ſtrength renewed in an inſtant. So ſurprizing a miracle might ſurely have convinced the Phariſees, that the Author muſt have been endued with power from on high; but, inſtead of being perſuaded that he was a perſon ſent from God, and laboured only for the benefit of the children of men, they were contriving how they might turn this miracle to his diſadvantage. Our Lord, however, ſoon diſconcerted their projects, by proving that, according to their own avowed practice, he had done nothing but what was truly lawful. "Which of you, (ſaid he) ſhall have an aſs or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not ſtraitway pull him out on the ſabbath-day?"

If a misfortune happen to one of your beaſts, you make no ſcruple of aſſiſting it on the ſabbath, though the action may be attended with conſiderable labour: and ſurely I may relieve a deſcendant of Abraham, when nothing more is requiſite than touching him with my hand. This argument was concluſive, and ſo plain, that the groſſeſt ſtupidity muſt feel its force, and the moſt virulent malice could not contradict it.

As the entertainment approached, our bleſſed Saviour had an opportunity of obſerving the pride of the Phariſees, and remarking what an anxiety each of them expreſſed to obtain the moſt honourable place at the table. Nor did he let their ridiculous behaviour paſs without a proper animadverſion; in which he obſerved, that pride generally expoſes a perſon to many affronts, and that humility is the ſureſt method of gaining reſpect. "When thou art bidden (ſaid he) of any man to a wedding, ſit not down in the higheſt room; leſt a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; and he that bade thee and him, come and

ſay to thee, Give this man place: and thou begin with ſhame to take the loweſt room. But when thou art bidden go and ſit down in the loweſt room, that when he that bade thee cometh, he may ſay unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then ſhalt thou have worſhip in the preſence of them that ſit at meat with thee.—For whoſoever exalteth himſelf ſhall be abaſed; and he that humbleth himſelf ſhall be exalted." *Luke* xiv. 8, &c.

Having thus addreſſed the gueſts in general, he turned him to the maſter of the houſe, and ſaid to him, "When thou makeſt a dinner or a ſupper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinſmen, nor thy rich neighbours: leſt they alſo bid thee again, and a recompenſe be made thee. But when thou makeſt a feaſt, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind." *Luke* xiv. 12, 13. Be very careful not to limit thy hoſpitality to the rich, but let the poor alſo partake of thy bounty, "And thou ſhalt be bleſſed; for they cannot recompenſe thee: for thou ſhalt be recompenſed at the reſurrection of the juſt." *Luke* xiv. 14.

One of the Phariſees, raviſhed with the delightful proſpect of the happineſs good men enjoyed in the heavenly Canaan, cried out, "Bleſſed is he that ſhall eat bread in the kingdom of God." Bleſſed is he, who being admitted into the happy regions of Paradiſe, ſhall enjoy the converſation of the inhabitants of thoſe heavenly countries; as thoſe ſpiritual repaſts muſt regale and invigorate his mind beyond expreſſion. In anſwer to which, our bleſſed Saviour delivered the parable of the marriage ſupper, repreſenting, by the invitation of the gueſts, the doctrine of the goſpel, and the ſucceſs thoſe beneficent invitations to the great feaſt of heaven, ſhould meet with among the Jews; foretelling, that though it was attended with every inviting circumſtance, they would diſdainfully reject it, and prefer the pleaſures of a temporal exiſtence to thoſe of an eternal ſtate; while the Gentiles, with the greateſt cheerfulneſs, would embrace the beneficent offer, and thereby be prepared to ſit down with Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, in the happy manſions of the kingdom of heaven. But as this parable was afterwards ſpoken by our bleſſed Saviour in the temple, we ſhall defer our obſervations on it, till we come to the hiſtory where it was again delivered.

When

When Jeſus departed the Phariſee's houſe, great multitudes of people thronged to him, to hear his doctrine; but miſtook the true intention of it, expecting he was going to eſtabliſh the Meſſiah's throne in Jeruſalem, and render all the nations of the world tributary to his power. The benevolent Jeſus therefore took the earlieſt opportunity to undeceive them, and to declare, in the plaineſt terms, that his kingdom was not of this world; and conſequently, that thoſe who expected, by following him, to obtain temporal advantages, would find themſelves wretchedly miſtaken; as, on the contrary, his diſciples muſt expect to be perſecuted from city to city, and hated of all men for his name's ſake: though it was requiſite for thoſe who would be his true followers, to prefer his ſervice to the riches, grandeur, and pleaſure of the world; and to ſhew, by their conduct, that they had much leſs reſpect and value for the deareſt objects of their affections, than for him. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and ſiſters, yea, and his own life alſo, he cannot be my diſciple. And whoſoever does not bear his croſs, and come after me, cannot be my diſciple." *Luke* xiv. 26, 27.

And in order to induce them to weigh this doctrine attentively in their minds, he elucidated it with two appoſite caſes, that of an unthinking builder, and that of a raſh warrior. The former was obliged to leave his ſtructure unfiniſhed, becauſe he had fooliſhly begun the building before he had computed the coſt; and the latter reduced to the dilemma of being ingloriouſly defeated, or meanly ſuing for peace, previous to the battle, having raſhly declared war before he had conſidered the ſtrength of his own and his enemy's army. "So likewiſe, whoſoever he be of you (added Jeſus) that forſaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my diſciple." *Luke* xiv. 33.

The publicans and ſinners, rouſed by the alarming doctrine of our Lord, liſtened to it attentively. This opportunity was readily embraced by the great Redeemer of mankind, who not only condeſcended to preach to them the happy tidings of eternal life, but even accompanied them to their own houſes; that, if poſſible, the ſeeds of the goſpel might take root in their hearts. But this condeſcenſion of the meek and humble

ble Jeſus was conſidered, by the haughty Phariſees, as an action too mean for the character of a prophet. They murmured, and were highly diſpleaſed at a condeſcenſion, which ought to have given them the greateſt joy. But Jeſus ſoon ſhewed them their miſtake, by repeating to them the parables of the loſt ſheep and piece of money. Intimating thereby, the great care all prophets and paſtors ought to take of thoſe committed to their care, and the obligation they lay under of ſearching diligently for every wandering ſinner, whoſe converſion is a grateful offering to the Almighty. "There is joy in the preſence of the angels of God, over one ſinner that repenteth." *Luke* xv. 10.

To illuſtrate this doctrine ſtill farther, and ſhew to the greateſt ſinner the willingneſs of God to receive him into his grace and favour, if convinced of his unworthy and loſt condition in himſelf, he implore his forgiveneſs through the merits of Jeſus Chriſt, and the renewal of his heart by the efficacious influences of his ſpirit, delivered the expreſſive parable of the prodigal ſon.

A certain man had two ſons, the younger of whom, not content to live in his father's houſe, ſafe under his protection, and happy under his eye, deſired his father to give him the portion of goods which fell to his ſhare. The indulgent father did not heſitate to grant his requeſt; but the ungrateful ſon had no ſooner obtained what he aſked of his parent, than he left the preſence and neighbourhood of ſo kind a father, and retired into a far country, where he had an opportunity of indulging, without reſtraint, his wicked inclinations; and there he waſted his ſubſtance in riotous living. Having thus conſumed the portion given him by his indulgent parent, he began to feel the miſeries of want, and, to add to his misfortunes, a terrible famine aroſe in that land; ſo that he ſoon became acquainted with the ſharp ſtings of hunger. In this diſtreſſed condition, he joined himſelf to a citizen of that country, willing to try every expedient, rather than return to his kind, his merciful father, and humbly confeſs his faults. His maſter, from a juſt contempt of his former prodigality, employed him in the meaneſt and moſt contemptible offices; he ſent him into his field to feed ſwine. Behold, here, ye ſons of extravagance, a change indeed! Behold this thoughtleſs prodigal, reduced at once from a life of

of voluptuouſneſs and gaiety, a life of pleaſure and exceſs, to a life of the moſt abject ſlavery, a life of penury and want! Nay, ſo great was his hunger, ſo prodigious his diſtreſs, that he would even have been contented, in this miſerable ſtate, to have ſatisfied the cravings of hunger, with the huſks eaten by the ſwine: but no man relieved him, no man ſhewed the leaſt compaſſion for him; ſo that the very ſwine were in a better condition than this miſerable prodigal!

Thus miſerably reduced, he was brought to himſelf: he had hitherto been in a ſtate of utter forgetfulneſs; but now began to reflect on his happy condition, while he continued with his father, before he had deviated from the paths of virtue, and to compare it with his preſent deplorable condition. "How many hired ſervants of my father (ſaid he to himſelf) have bread enough, and to ſpare, and I periſh with hunger?" I will therefore, undeſerving as I am, have recourſe to his mercy and favour. "I will ariſe and go to my father," for ſuch he ſtill is, and I, though wretched and loſt, am yet his ſon; I will therefore, "ſay unto him, Father, I have ſinned againſt heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy ſon:" that happineſs is too great for me to expect or deſire; I have, by my behaviour, forfeited all the right I once had in ſo endearing, ſo valuable a title: "Make me as one of thy hired ſervants." I deſire nothing more, than that thou wouldſt mercifully receive me as one of thy hired ſervants.

Having thus taken a firm reſolution of throwing himſelf at the feet of his father, and imploring forgiveneſs for his paſt offences, he did not delay to put it immediately into execution; he aroſe, and with the utmoſt expedition came to his father.

A ſcene of tenderneſs and affection, amazingly pathetic, now preſents itſelf to our view! His kind, his affectionate father ſaw him while he was yet afar off; his bowels yearned towards him, he had compaſſion on his loſt, his ruined child: paternal fondneſs would not ſuffer him to forbear, he ran to meet him, he fell on his neck, he kiſſed him. Encouraged by this kind reception, the ſon fell down at his father's feet, and began to make confeſſion of his faults, to plead his own unworthineſs, to requeſt his father's pardon:

"Father, (ſaid he) I have ſinned againſt heaven, and in thy ſight, and am no more worthy to be called thy ſon." He was not ſuffered to proceed any farther, the love of his parent prevented the reſt; he commanded his ſervants to bring the beſt robe, and put it on him, to put a ring on his hand, and ſhoes on his feet; and to kill the fatted calf, that they might eat and be merry. "For this, my ſon, (ſaid he) was dead, and is alive again; he was loſt, and is found."

During this tranſaction, the elder brother was in the field, properly employed in his father's buſineſs; but returning from thence, and hearing the ſound of mirth, muſic, and dancing, he called one of the ſervants, and aſked what theſe things meant? The ſervant replied, that his younger brother was returned, and that his father had killed the fatted calf, becauſe he had received him ſafe and ſound. This news greatly diſpleaſed the elder ſon; he was very angry, and refuſed to go in, upon which his father came out and intreated him; but he replied, "Lo! theſe many years do I ſerve thee, neither tranſgreſſed I at any time thy commandment, and yet thou never gaveſt me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as ſoon as this thy ſon was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou haſt killed for him the fatted calf." *Luke* xv. 29, &c.

His father with the moſt amiable condeſcending tenderneſs, replied, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine: it was meet that we ſhould make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was loſt, and is found." Though he hath devoured my living with harlots, yet he is both thy brother and my ſon; thou ſhouldeſt not, therefore, be angry, becauſe he has repented, and is returned, after we thought him irrecoverably loſt.

Thus beautifully did our Lord repreſent the work of grace on the heart of man, from the firſt conviction of ſin, to the abſolute confeſſion of it; ſhewing at the ſame time there can be no true confeſſion, without a thorough conſciouſneſs of guilt, a ſenſe of our loſt ſtate, and an entire reliance on the mercy of God thro' Chriſt our Lord.

There are three expoſitions given of this inſtructive repreſentation, each of which ſeems to have ſome place in the original deſign; for it ſhould be obſerved, and carefully remembered

remembered, that the parables and doctrines of our Saviour are by no means to be confined abſolutely to one ſingle point of view, ſince they frequently have relation to different objects, and conſequently prove the riches and depth of the manifold wiſdom of Omnipotence. In this parable, for inſtance, the great and principal doctrine, intended to be particularly inculcated, is, that ſinners, upon their repentance, are gladly received into favour; or that there is joy in heaven over one ſinner that repenteth. There are, however, two other expoſitions of this parable; the firſt is that of the greateſt part of the ancients, who expound it of Adam. He was made in the image of God, and endowed with many other excellent gifts, which he might have uſed happily, had he been content to ſtay in his father's houſe; but, like this younger brother, who fooliſhly deſired his portion of goods to himſelf, that he might be his own maſter, and under no confinement or reſtriction, he was unwilling to remain under the obedience of the divine precept; he was deſirous of having a free uſe of the things in Paradiſe, and by the devil's inſtigation affected a wretched independency, which cauſed him to break the divine command, and eat of the forbidden tree, to obtain the knowledge of good and evil.

Thus he loſt for himſelf, and his poſterity, the ſubſtance put at firſt into his poſſeſſion: but his heavenly Father on his, and his poſterity's return, hath provided ſuch grace and compaſſion for them, that they may be re-inſtated in their former place and favour. And the ſame grace not being granted to the higher order of intellectual beings, the fallen ſpirits, is the cauſe of their murmuring againſt God and men, repreſented by the anſwer of the elder brother in this parable; for it is conjectured by many, that the grace originally propoſed for man, through Chriſt, in caſe of his fall, was the principal occaſion of the rebellion of the apoſtate angels.

Others, ſecondly, With a much greater ſhew of probability, expound this parable of the two people, the Jews and Gentiles, and who have both one Father, even God. And while they both continued in their Father's houſe, the true church, they wanted for nothing; there was plenty of food for the ſoul, there was ſubſtance enough for them both. But the latter, repreſented by the younger brother, poſſeſſed of

of his ſhare of knowledge, went into a ſtrange country, left God, and ſpent his ſubſtance, the evidence and knowledge of the Almighty, fell into idolatry, and waſted all he had in riotous living; all his knowledge of God, in the looſe and abſurd ceremonies of idolatry. Then behold a mighty famine aroſe in that land, the worſhip of the true God was baniſhed the country. In this dreadful dearth and hunger, he joined himſelf to the devil, and worked all "Uncleanneſs with greedineſs." But finding nothing to ſatisfy his ſpiritual hunger, this prodigal, long eſtranged from his father, reflecting on his ſpiritual famine and his own ſevere wants, humbly confeſſed his faults, returned to his offended father, was re-admitted into favour, and bleſſed with the privileges of the Goſpel. But the elder brother, the Jewiſh church, daily employed in the field of legal ceremonies, and who had long groaned under the yoke of the law, ſeeing the Gentiles, received into the covenant of the goſpel, obtain the remiſſion of ſins, and the hopes of everlaſting life, murmured againſt the benevolent acts of the Almighty.

God, however, out of his great compaſſion, pleaded pathetically the cauſe with the elder brother, offered him all things, upon ſuppoſition of his continuing in his obedience, and declared that he had delivered the nations from the heavy yoke of the ceremonial law. Thus the parable has a very clear and elegant expoſition; the murmuring of the elder brother is explained to us without the leaſt difficulty; and as the offence of receiving the gentiles to pardon and peace through Jeſus Chriſt, was ſo great a ſtumbling block to the Jews, it is natural to imagine, that our Saviour intended to obviate and remove it by this excellent parable.

It is, however, evident, both from the context and the occaſion of delivering it, that the third interpretation is the firſt in deſign and importance. The publicans and ſinners drew near to hear Jeſus.

This gave occaſion to a murmuring among the Phariſees; and upon their murmuring, our Saviour delivered this and two other parables, to ſhew, that if they would reſemble God, and the celeſtial hoſt, they ſhould, inſtead of murmuring, rejoice at ſeeing ſinners willing to embrace the doctrines of the goſpel; becauſe there is joy in the preſence of God and his angels over one ſinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and

and nine juſt perſons that "need no repentance." The obſtinacy and malicious temper of the Phariſees, who oppoſed every good doctrine, made a deep impreſſion on the ſpirit of the bleſſed Jeſus; he did not therefore content himſelf barely with juſtifying his receiving ſinners, in order to their being juſtified and ſaved through him, but, in preſence of the Scribes and Phariſees, turned himſelf to his diſciples and delivered the parable of the artful ſteward, as an inſtance of the improvements made by the children of this world, in embracing every opportunity and advantage for improving their intereſts. "There was, (ſaid he) a certain rich man, which had a ſteward, and the ſame was accuſed unto him, that he had waſted his goods. And he called him, and ſaid unto him, how is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy ſtewardſhip: for thou mayeſt be no longer ſteward. *Luke* xvi. 1, 2.

This reprimand of his lord, and the inward conviction of his own conſcience, that the accuſation was juſt, induced him to reflect on his own ill management of his lord's affairs, and in what manner he ſhould ſupport himſelf when he ſhould be diſcharged from his ſervice. "What ſhall I do? (ſaid he) for my Lord taketh away from me the ſtewardſhip; I cannot dig, to beg I am aſhamed." In this manner he deliberated with himſelf and at laſt reſolved on the following expedient, in order to make himſelf friends, who would ſuccour him in his diſtreſs. "I am reſolved what to do, that when I am put out of the ſtewardſhip, they may receive me into their houſes; ſo he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and ſaid unto the firſt, how much oweſt thou unto my lord? and he ſaid an hundred meaſures of oil. And he ſaid unto him, take thy bill, and ſit down quickly, and write fifty. Then ſaid he to another, And how much oweſt thou? And he ſaid an hundred meaſures of wheat. And he ſaid unto him, take thy bill, and write fourſcore." *Luke* xvi. 4, &c.

To illuſtrate this parable, we beg leave to obſerve, that the riches and trade of the Jews originally conſiſted principally in the products of the earth: they were, if we may be allowed the expreſſion, a nation of farmers and ſhepherds; ſo that all their wealth aroſe from the produce of their flocks and herds, and the

fruits of the earth; their corn, their wine, and their oil.

Thus the ſteward, to ſecure the friendſhip of his Lord's tenants, bound them to him under a laſting obligation; and his maſter, when he heard of the proceeding of his ſteward, commended him, not becauſe he had acted honeſtly, but becauſe he had acted wiſely: he commended the art and addreſs he had ſhewn, in procuring a future ſubſiſtence; he commended the prudence and ingenuity he had uſed with regard to his own private intereſt, and to deliver him from future poverty and diſtreſs. "For the children of this world (added our Saviour) are in their generation wiſer than the children of light." They are more prudent and careful, more anxious and circumſpect to ſecure their poſſeſſions in this world, than the children of light are to ſecure in the next an eternal inheritance.--"And I ſay unto you, make unto yourſelves friends of the mammon of unrighteouſneſs; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlaſting habitations." *Luke* xvi. 9.

This advice of our Saviour is worthy our moſt ſerious attention; the beſt uſe we can make of our riches being to employ them in promoting the ſalvation of others. For if we uſe our abilities and intereſts in turning ſinners from the evil of their ways; if we ſpend our wealth in this excellent ſervice, we ſhall conciliate the good-will of our heavenly Father, who will greatly rejoice at the converſion of ſinners, and with open arms receive us into the manſions of felicity.

But this is not the whole application our Saviour made of this parable. He added, that if we made uſe of our riches in the manner he recommended, we ſhould be received into thoſe everlaſting habitations, where all the friends of virtue and religion reſide; becauſe, by our fidelity in managing the ſmall truſt of temporal advantages committed to our care, we ſhew ourſelves worthy and capable of a much greater truſt in heavenly employments. But if, on the contrary, we do not apply our riches to the glory of God, and the good of mankind, we ſhall be for ever baniſhed from the abode of the bleſſed; becauſe, in being unfaithful in the ſmall truſt committed to us here, we render ourſelves both unworthy and incapable of a ſhare in this everlaſting inheritance. "He that is faithful

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in that which is leaſt, is faithful alſo in much: and he that is unjuſt in the leaſt, is unjuſt alſo in much. If, therefore, ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your truſt the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who will give you that which is your own?" *Luke* xvi. 10, &c.

And if, while ye are God's ſtewards and ſervants, ye deſert your truſt, and become ſlaves to the deſire of riches, you can expect no other than to be called to a ſtrict account of your ſtewardſhip; covetouſneſs being as abſolutely inconſiſtent with a true concern for the cauſe of Chriſt, as it is for a man to undertake at one and at the ſame time, to ſerve two maſters of contrary diſpoſitions and oppoſite intereſts. "No ſervant can ſerve two maſters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or elſe he will hold to the one and deſpiſe the other. Ye cannot ſerve God and mammon." *Luke* xvi. 13.

Such is the parable, and ſuch is our Lord's application of it, from whence the main intention and deſign of it is very evident. It was intended to incite us to a zealous concern for our future and eternal ſtate, by making a due uſe of the means of grace, and working out our own ſalvation with fear and trembling, yet remembering that it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his own good pleaſure. And if we thus employ our ſpiritual talents, we ſhall joyfully ſtand at the right hand of the great Judge of all the earth, and receive from him a public teſtimony of our faith and love. "Come, ye bleſſed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, from the beginning of the world; for I was an hungry and ye gave me meat, I was thirſty and ye gave me drink: I was a ſtranger and ye took me in: naked and ye clothed me: I was ſick and ye viſited me, I was in priſon and ye came unto me." And thus ſhall we have made ourſelves friends of the mammon of unrighteouſneſs, and be received into everlaſting habitations.

CHAP. XXIV.

Jeſus rebukes the inſolent Deriſion of the Phariſees. Deſcribes, by a Parable, the Nature of future Rewards and Puniſhments; and enforces the Doctrine of mutual Forbearance.

THE doctrines lately delivered by our Lord, being ſo repugnant to the avaricious principles of

of the Phariſees, they attended to the doctrine of our Saviour with regard to the true uſe of riches and the impoſſibility of men ſerving God and mammon, but at the ſame time, they derided him as a viſionary ſpeculiſt, who deſpiſed the pleaſures of this world, for no other reaſon, than becauſe he was not able to procure them. It is, therefore, no wonder that men, who had ſhewn ſuch a complication of the very worſt diſpoſitions, ſhould receive a ſharp rebuke from the meek and humble Jeſus: accordingly he told them that they made, indeed, ſpecious pretences to extraordinary ſanctity, by outwardly ſhunning the company of ſinners, while in private they made no ſcruple of having ſociety with them, or even of joining with them in their wickedneſs. "Ye are they which juſtify yourſelves before men, but God knoweth your hearts."—Ye may, indeed, cover the foulneſs of your crimes, with the painted cloak of hypocriſy, and in this diſguiſe deceive thoſe who look no farther than the outſide, but ye cannot ſkreen your wickedneſs from the penetrating eye of Omnipotence, to whom all things are naked and expoſed, and who judges of things, not by their appearances, but according to truth; it is, therefore, no wonder that he often abhors both perſons and things that are held by men in the higheſt eſtimation: "for that which is highly eſteemed amongſt men, is abomination in the ſight of God."

This affected ſordity, while the mind is unrenewed, is an abomination to the God of purity and truth. I reject hypocriſy, and frequent the company of publicans and ſinners, to bring about their converſion; the Moſaic diſpenſation, which made a difference between men, ceaſing, when John the Baptiſt firſt preached the doctrine of repentance; and the goſpel diſpenſation, which admits all repenting ſinners, without diſtinction, then commenced. "The law and the prophets were until John: ſince that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man preſſeth into it." *Luke* xvi. 16.

Think not I mean to deſtroy, but to fulfil the law, which is of eſſential and eternal obligation; for till the law is abrogated, the leaſt of its precepts cannot be neglected. "It is eaſier for heaven and earth to paſs, than one tittle of the law to fail." *Luke* xvi. 17.

After treating of theſe particulars, he proceeded to conſider the love of pleaſure,

pleaſure, ſo highly valued by the Phariſees, whoſe luſt diſcovered itſelf by their frequent divorces, a practice which our bleſſed Saviour juſtly condemned. "Whoſoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whoſoever marrieth her that is put away from her huſband, committeth adultery." *Luke* xvi. 18.

Theſe reaſons were clear and unanſwerable: but the Phariſees, ſtupified and intoxicated with ſenſual pleaſures, were deaf to every argument, how powerful ſoever, provided it was levelled againſt their luſt. In order to illuſtrate this truth, confirm his aſſertion, and rouſe theſe hypocritical rulers from their lethargy, he ſpoke the awakening parable of the rich man and the beggar.

"There was a certain rich man, which was cloathed in purple and fine linen, and fared ſumptuouſly every day. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of ſores, and deſiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table; moreover (ſo great was his miſery, ſo exquiſite his diſtreſs) the dogs came and licked his ſores." Thus wretched in life, the Almighty, at laſt, releaſed him, "the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's boſom." Nor could the rich man's wealth reſcue him from the ſame fate, "the rich man alſo died, and was buried." But behold now the great, the awful change! "In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and ſeeth Abraham afar off, and (the late deſpiſed and afflicted) Lazarus, in his boſom." In this agony of pain and diſtreſs, he cried to Abraham, his earthly father, begging that he would take pity on him, and ſend Lazarus to give him even the leaſt degree of relief, that of dipping the tip of his finger in water to cool his tongue, for his torment was intolerable. "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and ſend Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham ſaid, Son, remember that thou in thy life time receivedſt thy good things, and likewiſe Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beſides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed; ſo that they which would paſs from hence to you, cannot: neither can they paſs to us, that would come from thence." *Luke* xvi. 24, &c.

The miſerable wretch, finding it impoſſible to procure any relief for himſelf, was deſirous of preſerving his thoughtleſs relations from the like diſtreſs; "Then he ſaid, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldſt ſend him to my father's houſe: for I have five brethren; that he may teſtify unto them, leſt they alſo come into this place of torment." *Luke* xvi. 27, 28. This alſo was a petition that could not be granted. It is too late to hope for relief, when the ſoul is caſt into the bottomleſs pit. They may learn, ſaid Abraham, the certainty of the immortality of the ſoul, from the books of Moſes and the prophets, if they will give themſelves the trouble to peruſe them attentively. To which the miſerable object replied, that the books of Moſes and the prophets had been ineffectual to him, and he feared would be ſo to his brethren. But if one actually aroſe from the dead, and appeared to them, they would certainly repent, and embrace thoſe offers of ſalvation they had before ſlighted. "Nay, farther Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." But Abraham told him, that in this he was greatly miſtaken: for that if they refuſed to believe the evidence of a future ſtate, contained in the writings of Moſes and the prophets, the teſtimony of a meſſenger from the dead would not be ſufficient to convince them. "If they hear not Moſes and the prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe from the dead."

This truth, aſſerted by Abraham, has been abundantly proved by undeniable facts; from whence it has appeared, that thoſe who will not be convinced by a ſtanding revelation, will not be convinced though one roſe from the dead. Theſe very Jews, to whom our Saviour ſpoke, were remarkable inſtances of this truth; they were fully aſſured that another Lazarus was, by the power of Chriſt, raiſed from the dead, after he had laid ſeveral days in the tomb; a fact which they were ſo far from being able to diſprove, that they attempted to kill Lazarus, as if, by this wicked action, they could have deſtroyed his evidence. Nay, they ſtill had a more lively proof, in the reſurrection of Jeſus himſelf, which they were ſo far from being able to deny, that they bribed the ſoldiers to ſpread that ſenſeleſs tale that his diſciples came by night and ſtole him away. So true were Abraham's words, that they who believe not Moſes,

Moſes and the prophets, which teſtify of Chriſt and his eternal redemption, would not be perſuaded, tho' one roſe from the dead.

There is not a more awakening and alarming example than this parable, through the whole goſpel; it is drawn in ſuch lively colours, that many, in all ages of the church, have conſidered it not as a parable, but as a real hiſtory; but however this be, the important truths delivered in it are equally clear, and equally certain. They are deſigned to deſcribe the difference between this ſtate and a future, between the children of this world and the children of light, the former having had the portion of happineſs here; but that of the latter being reſerved to a glorious one hereafter.

Having thus reprimanded the Phariſees, he took occaſion to ſpeak of affronts and offences, deſcribed their evil nature, and their dreadful puniſhment. "It is impoſſible (ſaid he) but that offences will come: but wo unto him through whom they come. It were better for him that a millſtone were hanged about his neck, and he caſt into the ſea, than that he ſhould offend one of theſe little ones." *Luke* xvii. 1, 2. That is, the children of God, the followers of the Lamb, muſt meet with diſgrace, reviling, and perſecution here; but, wo unto thoſe who revile and perſecute them, they had better undergo the worſt of temporary judgments, than the awful one which ſhall enſue.

He ſpake alſo againſt a quarrelſome temper in his ſervants, eſpecially in the miniſters and teachers of religion, preſcribed a ſeaſonable and prudent reprehenſion of the fault, accompanied with forgiveneſs on the part of the perſon injured, as the beſt means of diſarming the temptation that may ariſe from thence. "Take heed to yourſelves: if thy brother treſpaſs againſt thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he treſpaſs againſt thee ſeven times in a day, and ſeven times in a day turn to thee, ſaying, I repent; thou ſhalt forgive him." *Luke* xvii. 3, 4.

It ſhould be obſerved, that this diſcourſe on forgiveneſs, uttered at a time when the Phariſees had juſt affronted him, by calling him a falſe teacher, ſufficiently proves how truly he forgave them all the perſonal injuries they had committed againſt him; and ſhould be a powerful recommendation of that amiable virtue, the forgiveneſs of injuries.

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But however beautiful theſe diſcourſes of our Saviour appear, when examined with attention, they ſeem to have ſtaggered the faith of his diſciples and followers; perhaps they ſtill imagined, that he would ſhortly erect a temporal kingdom, and diſtribute among them the rewards they expected for their ſervices.—If ſo, they might well deſire their Maſter "to increaſe their faith;" as diſcourſes like theſe had a very different tendency from what might naturally have been expected from one who was going to eſtabliſh the throne of David, and extend his ſceptre over all the kingdoms of the earth; but, however this be, our Saviour told them, that if they had the ſmalleſt degree of true faith, it would be ſufficient for overcoming all temptations, even thoſe, which ſeem as difficult to be conquered as the plucking up trees, and planting them in the ocean. "If ye had faith as a grain of muſtard ſeed, ye might ſay unto this ſycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the ſea, and it ſhould obey you." *Luke* xvii. 6.

CHAP. XXV.

Our Lord is applied to in behalf of poor Lazarus.—Cures ten Perſons of the Leproſy, in Samaria, and reſtores Lazarus to Life.

SOON after our bleſſed Saviour had finiſhed theſe diſcourſes, one of his friends, named Lazarus, fell ſick at Bethany, a village about two miles from the countries beyond Jordan, where Jeſus was now preaching the goſpel. The ſiſters of Lazarus finding his ſickneſs was of a dangerous kind, thought proper to ſend an account of it to Jeſus; being firmly perſuaded, that he who had cured ſo many ſtrangers would readily come and give health to one whom he loved in ſo tender a manner. "Lord (ſaid they) Behold he whom thou loveſt is ſick:" they did not add, come down and heal him, make haſte and ſave him from the grave; it was ſufficient for them to relate their neceſſities to their Lord, who was both able and willing to help them from their diſtreſs.

"When Jeſus heard that, he ſaid, This ſickneſs is not unto death."—The declaration of the benevolent Jeſus being carried to the ſiſters of Lazarus, muſt ſtrangely ſurpriſe them, and exerciſe both theirs and his diſciples faith; ſince it is probable, that before the meſſenger arrived at Bethany, Lazarus had expired. Soon after, Jeſus poſitively aſſured his diſciples, that Lazarus was dead.

The

The Evangeliſt, in the beginning of this account, tells us, that Jeſus loved Martha, and her ſiſter, and Lazarus; and that after he had received the meſſage, he abode two days in the ſame place where he was. His deſign in this might be to inſinuate that his lingering ſo long after the meſſage came, did not proceed from a want of concern for his friends, but happened according to the counſels of his own wiſdom. For the length of time which Lazarus lay in the grave, put his death beyond all poſſibility of doubt, removed every ſuſpicion of fraud, and conſequently afforded Jeſus a fit opportunity of diſplaying the love he bore to Lazarus, as well as his exertion of power, in his undoubted reſurrection from the dead. His ſiſters, indeed, were by this means, kept a while in painful anxiety, on account of their brother's life, and at laſt pierced by the ſorrows of ſeeing him die; yet they muſt ſurely think themſelves abundantly recompenſed, by the evidence according to the goſpel, from this aſtoniſhing miracle, as well as by the inexpreſſible ſurprize or joy they felt, when they again received their brother from the dead.

Two days being thus expired, Jeſus ſaid to his diſciples, "Let us go into Judea again." *John* xi. 7. His diſciples were aſtoniſhed at this propoſal, and the recollection of his late danger, in that country, alarmed them: "Maſter (ſaid they) the Jews of late ſought to ſtone thee: and goeſt thou thither again?" Wilt thou hazard thy life among thoſe who deſired nothing more than to find an opportunity of killing thee? "Jeſus anſwered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he ſtumbleth not, becauſe he ſeeth the light of this world: But if a man walk in the night, he ſtumbleth, becauſe there is no light in him." *John* xi. 9. 10.

By this he intended to inform his diſciples, that thoſe who lived by faith, and acted under the infallible influence of the divine Spirit, could not ſtumble; whereas thoſe who followed the directions of unenlightened nature, were liable to perpetual error.

Jeſus having removed their groundleſs apprehenſions, and ſtrengthened their faith, that he might clearly explain to them the cauſe of his going into Judea again, told them, "Our friend Lazarus ſleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of

ſleep." The diſciples underſtanding his diſcourſe, in a literal ſenſe, replied, "Lord, if he ſleep, he ſhall do well:" his diſtemper is abated, and he, in all probability, is recovering. It would be, therefore, highly unreaſonable in us, to take two days journey only to awake him out of his ſleep. Thus they diſcovered their fears, and hinted to their maſter, that it would be far ſafer to continue where they were, than to take a hazardous journey into Judea.

They were, however, miſtaken; for the Evangeliſt informs us, that he "ſpake of his death, but they thought that he had ſpoken of taking reſt in ſleep." Jeſus, therefore, to remove any doubt, ſaid plainly to them, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your ſakes, that I was not there (to the intent that ye may believe)" I am glad for your ſakes, that I was not in Judea before he died; for had I been there, and reſtored him to his health, your faith in me, as the Meſſiah, muſt have wanted the great confirmation it ſhall now receive, by your beholding me raiſe him again from the dead.

Having thus given his diſciples a proof of his divine knowledge, and of the deſigns of Providence in the death of Lazarus, our bleſſed Saviour added, "Nevertheleſs let us go unto him." Thus Jeſus, who could have raiſed Lazarus without opening his lips, or riſing from his ſeat, leaves his place of retirement beyond Jordan, and takes a long journey into Judea, where the Jews lately attempted to kill him; becauſe his being preſent in perſon, and raiſing Lazarus again to life, before ſo many witneſſes at Bethany, where he died, and was ſo well known, would be the means of bringing the men of that place, as well as others, who ſhould hear of it even in future ages, to prepare them for a reſurrection to eternal life; an admirable proof, as an emblem of which, he gave them in this great miracle.

Jeſus having thus declared his reſolution of returning into Judea, Thomas conceiving nothing leſs than deſtruction from ſuch a journey, yet unwilling to forſake his maſter, ſaid, "Let us alſo go, that we may die with him." Let us not forſake our maſter in this dangerous journey, but accompany him into Judea, that if the Jews, whoſe inveteracy we are well acquainted with, ſhould take away his life, we may alſo expire with him.

The journey to Judea being thus reſolved

reſolved on, Jeſus departed with his diſciples, and in his way to Bethany paſſed through Samaria and Galilee. "And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which ſtood afar off; and they lifted up their voices, and ſaid, Jeſus, Maſter, have mercy on us. And when he ſaw them he ſaid unto them, Go ſhew yourſelves unto the prieſts. And it came to paſs, that as they went, they were cleanſed." *Luke* xvii. 12, &c.

Among theſe miſerable objects, one of them was a native of the country, who perceiving that his cure was completed, came back praiſing God for the great mercy he had received; he had before kept at a diſtance from our Saviour, but being now ſenſible that he was entirely clean, approached his benefactor, that all might have opportunity of beholding the miracle, and fell on his face at his feet, thanking him, in the moſt humble manner, for his condeſcenſion in healing him of ſo terrible a diſeaſe. Jeſus, in order to intimate, that thoſe who were enlightened with the knowledge of the truth ought, at leaſt, to have ſhewn as great a ſenſe of piety and gratitude as this Samaritan, aſked, "were there not ten cleanſed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, ſave this ſtranger." *Luke* xvii. 17.

Jeſus and his diſciples now continued their journey towards Bethany, where he was informed by ſome of the inhabitants of that village, that Lazarus was not only dead, as he had foretold, but had now lain in the grave four days. The afflicted ſiſter were overwhelmed with ſorrow; ſo that many of the Jews from Jeruſalem came to comfort them, concerning their brother.

It ſeems the news of our Lord's coming had reached Bethany, before he arrived at that village; for Martha, the ſiſter of Lazarus, being informed of his approach, went out, and met him, but Mary, who was of a more melancholy and contemplative diſpoſition, ſat ſtill in the houſe. No ſooner was ſhe come into the preſence of Jeſus, than in an exceſs of grief ſhe poured forth her complaints, "Lord (ſaid ſhe) if thou hadſt been here, my brother had not died." If thou hadſt complied with the meſſage we ſent thee, I well know that thy intereſt from heaven had prevailed, my brother had been cured of his diſeaſe, and delivered from the grave.

Martha,

Martha, doubtleſs, entertained a high opinion of our Saviour's power; ſhe believed that death did not dare to approach his preſence; and conſequently, if Jeſus had arrived at Bethany, before her brother's diſſolution, he had not fallen a victim to the king of terrors. But ſhe imagined that it was not in his power to heal the ſick at a diſtance; tho', at the ſame time, ſhe ſeemed to have ſome dark and imperfect hopes, that our bleſſed Lord would ſtill do ſomething for her. "But I know (ſaid ſhe) that even now whatſoever thou wilt aſk of God, God will give it thee." She thought that Jeſus could obtain whatſoever he deſired by prayer; and therefore did not found her hopes on his power, but on the power of God, through his interceſſion. She, doubtleſs, knew that the great Redeemer of mankind had raiſed the daughter of Jairus, and the widow's ſon at Nain, from the dead; but ſeems to have conſidered her brother's reſurrection as much more difficult; probably becauſe he had been longer dead.

But Jeſus, who was willing to encourage this imperfect faith of Martha, anſwered, "Thy brother ſhall riſe again." As theſe words were delivered in an indifinite ſenſe, with regard to time, Martha underſtood them only as an argument of conſolation, drawn from the general reſurrection, and accordingly anſwered, "I know that he ſhall riſe again at the reſurrection, at the laſt day." She was firmly perſuaded of that important article of the chriſtian faith, the "reſurrection of the dead;" at which important hour ſhe believed her brother would riſe from the chambers of the duſt. And here ſhe ſeems to have terminated all her hopes, not thinking that the Son of God would call her brother from the ſleep of death. Jeſus, therefore, to inſtruct her in this great truth, replied, "I am the reſurrection and the life." I am the author of the reſurrection, the fountain and giver of that life they ſhall then receive; and therefore can, with the ſame eaſe, raiſe the dead now, as at the laſt day. "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet ſhall he live, and whoſoever liveth and believeth in me, ſhall never die. Believeſt thou this?" To which Martha anſwered, "Yea, Lord; I believe that thou art the Chriſt, the Son of God, which ſhould come into the world." I believe that thou art the true Meſſiah, ſo long promiſed by the Prophets, and therefore believe

lieve thou art capable of performing every inſtance of power thou art pleaſed to undertake.

Martha now ſeemed to entertain ſome confuſed expectations of her brother's immediate reſurrection; and leaving Jeſus in the field, ran and called her ſiſter, according to order, being willing that both Mary and her companions ſhould be witneſſes of this ſtupendous miracle.

Mary no ſooner heard that Jeſus was come, than ſhe immediately left her Jewiſh comforters, who only increaſed the weight of her grief, and flew to her Saviour. The Jews, who ſuſpected ſhe was going to weep over the grave of her brother, followed her to that Great Prophet, who was going to remove all her ſorrows. Thus the Jews, who came from Jeruſalem to comfort the two mournful ſiſters, were brought to the grave of Lazarus, and made witneſſes of his reſurrection.

As ſoon as Mary approached the great Redeemer of mankind, ſhe fell proſtrate at his feet, and in a flood of tears poured out her complaint, "Lord, if thou hadſt been here, my brother had not died." No wonder the compaſſionate Jeſus was moved at ſo affecting a ſcene; at his ſide ſtood Martha, pouring forth a flood of tears, at his feet lay the affectionate Mary, weeping and lamenting her dear departed brother: while the Jews who came to comfort the afflicted ſiſters, unable to confine their grief, joined the ſolemn mourning, and mixed their friendly tears, in witneſs of their love for the departed Lazarus, and in teſtimony to the juſtice of the ſiſters grief, for the loſs of ſo amiable, ſo deſerving a brother. Jeſus could not behold the affliction of the two ſiſters, and their friends, without having a ſhare in it himſelf; his heart was melted at the mournful ſcenes, "he groaned in ſpirit, and was troubled."

To remove the doubts and fears of theſe pious women, he aſked them, where they had buried Lazarus; not that he was ignorant where the body of the deceaſed was laid: he who knew that he was dead, when ſo far diſtant from him, and could raiſe him up by a ſingle word, muſt know where his remains were depoſited; to which they anſwered, "Lord, come and ſee." The Son of God, to ſhew us, that the tender affections of a human heart, when kept in due bounds; that friendly ſorrow, when not immoderate, and directed to proper

ends, is consistent with the highest sanctity of the soul, joined in the general mourning. He wept, even to the time that he was going to give the most ample proof of his divinity.

By his weeping, the Jews were convinced that he loved Lazarus exceedingly; but some of them interpreted this circumstance to his disadvantage; for according to their mean way of judging, they fancied that he had suffered him to fall by the stroke of death, for no other reason in the world, but for want of power to rescue him. And thinking the miracle said to have been wrought on the blind men, at the feast of tabernacles, at least as difficult as the curing an acute distemper, they called the former in question, because the latter had been neglected. "Could not this man, (said they) which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?"

Our Lord, regardless of their question, but grieving at the hardness of their hearts, and blindness of their infidelity, groaned again within himself, as he walked towards the sepulchre of the dead. At his coming to the grave, he said, "Take ye away the stone. To which Martha, answered, Lord, by this time he stinketh; for he hath been dead four days;" or as the passage may be better rendered, hath lain in the grave four days. She meant to insinuate that her brother's resurrection was not now to be expected. But Jesus gave her a solemn reproof, to teach her that there was nothing impossible with God; and that the power of the Almighty is not to be circumscribed, within the narrow bounds of human reason. "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" i. e. Have but faith, and I will display before thee the effect of Omnipotence.

The objections of Martha being thus obviated, she, with the rest, waited the great event in silence; and, in pursuance of the command of the Son of God, took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. Jesus had, on many occasions, publicly appealed to his own miracles. But being now to raise Lazarus from the dead, he prayed for his resurrection, to convince the spectators that it could not be effected, without an immediate interposition of his heavely Father. "Father (said he) I thank thee that thou hast heard me, and I knew that

that thou heareſt me always; but becauſe of the people which ſtand by, I ſaid it, that they may believe that thou haſt ſent me." *John* xi. 41, &c. I entertained no doubt of thy empowering me to do this miracle, and therefore did not pray for my own ſake; I well knew that thou heareſt me always. I prayed for the ſake of the people, to convince them that thou loveſt me, haſt ſent me, and art continually with me.

After returning thanks to his Father, for this opportunity of diſplaying his glory, "He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth." This loud and efficacious call of the Son of God awakened the dead; the breathleſs clay was inſtantly reanimated; and he who had lain four days in the tomb, obeyed immediately the powerful ſound.—"And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin: Jeſus ſaith unto them, Looſe him, and let him go." *John* xi. 44. It would have been the leaſt part of the miracle, had Jeſus by his powerful word unlooſed the napkin wherewith Lazarus was bound; but he brought him out in the ſame manner as he was lying, and ordered the ſpectators to looſe him, that they might be better convinced of the miracle; for, in taking off the grave-cloths, they had the fulleſt evidence both of his death and reſurrection. For on the one hand, the manner in which he was ſwathed muſt ſoon have killed him had he been alive when buried; which conſequently demonſtrated, beyond all exception, that Lazarus had been dead ſeveral days, before Jeſus called him again to life: beſides, in ſtripping him, the linen offered, both to their eye and ſmell, abundant proofs of his putrefaction; and by that means convinced them, that he had not been in a delirium, but was really dead.

On the other hand, by his lively countenance appearing, when the napkin was removed, his freſh colour, and his active vigour, thoſe who came near, and handled him, muſt be convinced that he was in perfect health, and had an opportunity of proving the truth of the miracle, by the cloſeſt examination. There is ſomething exceeding beautiful in our Lord's behaviour on this occaſion; he did not utter one upbraiding word, either to the doubting ſiſters, or the malicious Jews, nor did he let fall one word of triumph

umph or exultation. "Looſe him and let him go," were the only words we have recorded. He was in this, as on all other occaſions, conſiſtent with himſelf, a pattern of perfect humility and abſolute ſelf-denial.

Such was the aſtoniſhing work wrought by the Son of God at Bethany; and in the reſurrection of Lazarus thus corrupted, and thus raiſed by the powerful call of Jeſus, we have a ſtriking emblem, and a glorious earneſt, of the reſurrection of our bodies from the grave, at the laſt day, when the ſame powerful mandate which ſpoke Lazarus again into being, ſhall collect the ſcattered particles of our bodies, and raiſe them to immortality.

Such an extraordinary power diſplayed before the face of a multitude, and near to Jeruſalem, even overcome the prejudices of ſome of the moſt obſtinate among them.—Many believed that Jeſus could be no other than the great Meſſiah, ſo long promiſed; though others, who ſtill expected a temporal prince, and therefore unwilling to acknowledge him for their Saviour, were filled with indignation, particularly the chief prieſt and elders. But this miracle, as well as all the reſt he had wrought in confirmation of his miſſion, was too evident to be denied; and, therefore, they pretended that his whole intention was to eſtabliſh a new ſect in religion, which would endanger both their church and nation. "Then gathered the chief prieſts and the Phariſees a council, and ſaid, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him; and the Romans ſhall come and take away both our place and nation." *John* xi. 47, &c.

The common people, aſtoniſhed at this miracle, will, if we do not take care to prevent it, certainly ſet him up for the Meſſiah; and the Romans, under pretence of a rebellion, will deprive us both of our liberty and religion. Accordingly they came to a reſolution to put him to death.

This reſolution was not, however, unanimous; for Nicodemus, Joſeph of Aramathea, and other diſciples of our Saviour, then members of the council, urged the injuſtice of what they propoſed to do, from the conſideration of his miracles and innocence. But Caiaphas the high prieſt, from a principal of human policy, told them, that the nature of

of government often required certain acts of injuſtice in order to procure the ſafety of the ſtate. "Ye know nothing at all, nor conſider that it is expedient for us, that one man ſhould die for the people, and that the whole nation periſh not." *John* xi. 49, 50.

The council having thus determined to put Jeſus to death, deliberated for the future only upon the beſt methods of affecting it; and, in all probability, agreed to iſſue a proclamation, promiſing a reward to any perſon who would deliver him into their hands. For this reaſon, our bleſſed Saviour did not now go up to Jeruſalem, though he was within two miles of it; but returned to Ephraim, a city on the borders of the wilderneſs, where he abode with his diſciples, being unwilling to go too far into the country, becauſe the paſſover, at which he was to ſuffer, was now at hand.

CHAP. XXVI.

The Great Prophet of Iſrael foretels the Ruin of the Jewiſh State, and enforces many important Doctrines by Parable. He bleſſeth the Children as Emblems of the heavenly and chriſtian Temper and Diſpoſition.

WHILE the bleſſed Jeſus remained in retirement on the borders of the wilderneſs, he was deſired by ſome of the Phariſees to inform them, when the Meſſiah's kingdom would commence. Nor is their anxiety on that account a matter of ſurpriſe; for as they entertained very exalted notions of his coming in pomp and magnificence, it was natural for them to be very deſirous of having his empire ſpeedily erected. But our Saviour, to correct this miſtaken notion, told them, that the Meſſiah's kingdom did not conſiſt in any external pomp of government, erected in ſome particular country by the terror of arms, and deſolation of war; but in the ſubjection of the minds of men, and in rendering them conformable to the laws of the Almighty, which was to be effected by a new diſpenſation of religion, and this diſpenſation was already began. It was, therefore, needleſs for them to ſeek in this or that place for the kingdom of God, as it had been already preached among them by Chriſt and his apoſtles, and confirmed by innumerable miracles. "The kingdom of God, (ſaid he) cometh not with obſervation. Neither ſhall they ſay, Lo, here, or lo, there; for behold, the kingdom of God is within you." *Luke* xvii. 20, 21.

Having thus addreſſed the Pha-

riſees, he turned himſelf to his diſciples, and, in the hearing of all the people, propheſied the deſtruction of the Jewiſh ſtate; whoſe conſtitution, both religious and civil, was the chief difficulty that oppoſed the erection of his kingdom. But becauſe love and compaſſion were eminent parts of our Saviour's temper, he mentioned that dreadful cataſtrophe in ſuch a manner as might tend to the reformation and profit of his hearers. He informed them, that the prelude to this final deſtruction would be an univerſal diſtreſs; when they ſhould paſſionately wiſh for the perſonal preſence of the Meſſiah to comfort them, but would be denied their requeſt. "The days will come, when ye ſhall deſire to ſee one of the days of the Son of man, and ye ſhall not ſee it." *Luke* xvii. 22.—He next cautioned them againſt thoſe who ſhall recommend different ways of eſcaping the awful cataſtrophe, but are utterly unable: "And they ſhall ſay to you, See here, or ſee there; go not after them, nor follow them. For as the lightning that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, ſhineth unto the other part under heaven, ſo ſhall alſo the Son of Man be in his day. But firſt muſt he ſuffer many things, and be rejected of this generation." *Luke* xvii. 23, &c.

The coming of the Son of man ſhall be ſudden and unexpected.—He will come in his own ſtrength, and with great power; he will throw down all oppoſitions, deſtroy his enemies with ſwift deſtruction, and eſtabliſh his religion and government in a great part of the world, as ſuddenly as lightning darts from one part of the heaven to the other. But before theſe things come to paſs, he muſt ſuffer many things, and be rejected of this generation.

Notwithſtanding this ſudden deſtruction and calamity that was to overwhelm the Jews, he told them their ſtupidity would be equal to that of the old world, at the time of the deluge, or that of Sodom, before the city was deſtroyed; "And as it was in the days of Noe, ſo ſhall it be alſo in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark: and the flood came, and deſtroyed them all. Likewiſe alſo as it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, they bought, they ſold, they planted, they builded: but the ſame day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire

fire and brimſtone from heaven, and deſtroyed them all: even thus ſhall it be in the day, when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he which ſhall be upon the houſe-top, and his ſtuff in the houſe, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewiſe not return back. Remember Lot's wife." *Luke* xvii. 26, &c.

A more proper example than that of Lot's wife could not have been produced; for if any of his hearers, through an immoderate love of the world, ſhould be prevailed on, in order to ſave their goods, after they were admoniſhed from heaven of their danger, by the ſigns which prognoſticated the deſtruction of Jeruſalem; or if any of them, through want of faith, ſhould think, that the calamities predicted to fall on the nation would not be either ſo great or ſudden as he had declared, and did not uſe the precaution of a ſpeedy flight: they might behold in Lot's wife an example both of their ſin, and of their puniſhment. He added, that thoſe who were anxiouſly deſirous of preſerving life, from an attachment to its pleaſures and vanities, ſhould loſe it; whereas thoſe who were willing to lay down their lives in his cauſe, ſhould preſerve them eternally. "Whoſoever ſhall ſeek to ſave his life, ſhall loſe it; and whoſoever ſhall loſe his life, ſhall preſerve it." *Luke* xvii. 33.

Having foretold the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, our bleſſed Saviour ſpake the following parable, in order to excite them to a conſtant perſeverance in prayer, and not to be ſo weary and faint in their minds, as to neglect, or wholly omit this neceſſary duty.

There was in a city, ſaid the Saviour of the world, a judge, who being governed by atheiſtical principles, had no regard to the precepts of religion, and being very powerful did not regard what was ſaid of him by man: ſo that all his deciſions were influenced merely by paſſion or intereſt. In the ſame city was alſo a widow, who, having no friends to aſſiſt her, was abſolutely unable to defend herſelf from injuries, or procure redreſs for any ſhe had received. In this deplorable ſituation ſhe had recourſe to the unjuſt judge, in order to obtain ſatisfaction for ſome oppreſſive wrong ſhe had lately received; but the judge was ſo abandoned to pleaſure, that he refuſed, for a time, to liſten to her requeſt; he would not give himſelf the trouble to examine her

caſe

case, though the crying injustice pleaded so powerfully for this distressed widow. She was not, however, intimidated by his refusal; she incessantly importuned him, till, by repeated representations of her distress, she filled his mind with such displeasing ideas, that he was obliged to do her justice, merely to free himself from her importunity. "Though (said he to himself) I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest, by her continual coming, she weary me." *Luke* xviii. 4, 5.

The sentiment conveyed by our blessed Saviour, in this parable, is very beautiful. We hence learn, that the cries of the afflicted will, by being incessantly repeated, make an impression even on the stony hearts of wicked men, who glory in their impiety, and laugh at all the precepts of justice, virtue, and religion: and, therefore, cannot fail of being regarded by the benevolent Father of the universe, who listens to the petitions of his faithful servants, and pours on their heads the choicest of his blessings.

"Hear (said the blessed Jesus) what the unjust judge saith: and shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you, that he will avenge them speedily." *Luke* xviii. 6, &c. As if he had said, if this man, though destitute of the fear either of God or man, was thus prompted to espouse the cause of the widow; shall not a righteous God, the Father of his people, avenge on the wicked, the many evils they have done unto them, though he bear long with them?—Certainly he will, and that in a most awful manner.

Our blessed Saviour, having thus inforced the duty of prayer, in this expressive parable, asked the following appolite question, "Nevertheless, when the son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"—As if he had said, notwithstanding all the miracles I have wrought, and the excellent doctrines I have delivered, shall I find, at my second coming, the faith among the children of men, there is reason to expect? Will not most of them be found to have abandoned the faith, and wantonly ask, "where is the promise of his coming?"

The blessed Jesus next rebuked the self-righteous Pharisees. But as these particulars are better illustrated by their opposites, he placed the

the character of this ſpecies of men, in oppoſition to thoſe of the humble; deſcribing the reception each claſs met with from the Almighty, in a parable of the Phariſee and Publican, who went up together to the temple, at the time when the ſacrifice was offered, to direct their petitions to the God of their fathers.

The Phariſee, having a high opinion of his own righteouſneſs, went far into the court of the temple, that he might be as near the place of the divine reſidence as poſſible. Here he offered his prayer, giving God the praiſe of his ſuppoſed righteouſneſs, and had he been poſſeſſed of any, he would have acted properly, "God, (ſaid he) I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjuſt, adulterers, or even as this publican. I faſt twice in the week, I give tythes of all that I poſſeſs." *Luke* xviii. 11, 12.

Having thus commended himſelf to God, he wrapped himſelf up in his own righteouſneſs: and giving the poor publican a ſcornful look, walked away, perhaps to tranſgreſs ſome of the weightier matters of the law, judgment, juſtice, and truth, and to devour the houſes of diſtreſſed widows, and helpleſs orphans. But how different was the behaviour of the humble publican? Impreſſed with a deep ſenſe of his own unworthineſs, he would not even enter the courts of the temple; but ſtood afar off, and ſmote upon his breaſt, and in the bitterneſs of his ſoul, earneſtly implored the mercy of Omnipotence. "And the publican ſtanding afar off, would not lift up ſo much as his eyes unto heaven, but ſmote upon his breaſt: ſaying, God be merciful to me a ſinner." *Luke* xviii. 13.

Specious as the Phariſee's behaviour may ſeem, his prayer was an abomination to the Lord; while the poor publican, who confeſſed his guilt, and implored mercy, was juſtified in the ſight of God, rather than this arrogant boaſter.

This parable ſufficiently indicates, that all the ſons of men ſtand in need of mercy: both the ſtrict Phariſee, and the deſpiſed Publican, with the whole race of mankind, are ſinners; and conſequently all muſt implore pardon of their benevolent Creator. We muſt all aſcend to the temple, and there pour forth our prayers before the throne of grace; for there he has promiſed ever to be preſent, to grant the petitions of all who aſk with ſincerity and truth, through the Son of his love.

These parables were spoken in the town of Ephraim: and during his continuance in that city, the Pharisees asked him, Whether he thought it lawful for a man to put away his wife, for every cause? Our Saviour had twice before declared his opinion of this particular, once in Galilee, and once in Perea; it is therefore probable, that the Pharisees were not ignorant of his sentiments, and that they asked the question then, to find an opportunity of incensing the people against him, well knowing that the Israelites held the liberty which the law gave them of divorcing their wives, as one of their chief privileges; but however that be, Jesus was far from fearing the popular resentment, and accordingly declared the third time against arbitrary divorces. The Pharisees then asked him, why they were commanded by Moses to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? insinuating, that Moses was so tender of their happiness, that he gave them liberty of putting away their wives, when they saw occasion. To which Jesus answered, Because of the hardness of your hearts, Moses suffered you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so. As unlimitted divorces were not permitted in the state of innocence, so neither shall they be under the gospel dispensation. "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery. And whoso marrieth her that is put away, doth commit adultery." *Matt.* xix. 9.

The disciples were greatly surprised at their Master's decision; and though they held their peace, while the Pharisees were present, yet they did not fail to ask him the reason on which he founded his determination, when they were returned home. "And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter; and he saith unto them, whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery." *Mark* x. 10.

The practice of unlimitted divorces, which prevailed among the Jews, gave great encouragement to family quarrels, were very destructive of happiness, and hindered the education of their common offspring. Besides, it greatly tended to make their children lose that reverence for

for them which is due to parents, as it was hardly poſſible for the children to avoid engaging in the quarrel.

Our Lord's prohibition, therefore, of theſe divorces, is founded on the ſtrongeſt reaſons, and greatly tends to promote the welfare of ſociety.

Our Saviour having, in the courſe of his miniſtry, performed innumerable cures, in different parts of the country, ſeveral perſons thinking, perhaps, that his power would be as great in preventing, as in removing diſtempers, brought their children to him, deſiring that he would put his hands upon them and bleſs them. The diſciples, however, miſtaking the intention, were angry with the perſons, and rebuked them for endeavouring to give this trouble to their Maſter. But Jeſus no ſooner ſaw it, than he was greatly diſpleaſed with his diſciples, and ordered them not to hinder parents from bringing their children to him. "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of ſuch is the kingdom of God." *Luke* xviii. 16.

Such are thoſe, in a ſpiritual ſenſe, who are brought to a ſenſe of their ſins, and humbled for them in the ſight of God.

CHAP. XXVII.

Our Lord departs from his Retirement. Declares the only Way of Salvation. Shews the Duty of improving the Means of Grace, by the Parables of the Vineyard. Prediction of his Suffering, and Contention of the Diſciples about Precedence in his Kingdom.

THE period of our bleſſed Saviour's paſſion now approaching, he departed from Ephraim, and repaired by the way of Jericho, towards Jeruſalem: but before he arrived at Jericho, a ruler of the ſynagogue came running to him, and kneeling down before him, aſked him, "Good Maſter, what good things ſhall I do, that I may have eternal life?" *Matt.* xix. 16.

Though this young ruler pretended to pay greater honour to our dear Redeemer, yet the whole was no more than a piece of raillery. For though he ſtiled him *good*, yet he did not believe that he was ſent from God, as ſufficiently appears from his refuſing to obſerve the counſel given him by Jeſus: nor could his artful inſinuations eſcape the piercing eye of the great Saviour of the world. He well knew his ſecret intentions, and beheld the inmoſt receſſes of his ſoul; and accordingly rebuked him for his hypocritical addreſs, before he anſwer-

thou

ed his queſtion. "Why calleſt thou me good? there is none good, but one, that is God." *Matt.* xix. 17. But as he had deſired the advice of our bleſſed Jeſus, who never refuſed it to any of the ſons of men, he readily anſwered his queſtion; by telling him, that he muſt obſerve all the moral precepts of the law; there being a neceſſary connexion between the duties of piety towards the Almighty, and of juſtice and temperance towards men, the latter of which were much more difficult to counterfeit than the former. "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He ſaith unto him, Which? Jeſus ſaid, Thou ſhalt do no murder; Thou ſhalt not commit adultery; Thou ſhalt not ſteal; Thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs: Honour thy father and thy mother: And Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf. The young man ſaith unto him, All theſe things have I kept, from my youth up: what lack I yet?" *Matt.* xix. 17.

Theſe commandments, perhaps, he had obeyed, in the vague ſenſe put upon them by the doctors and interpreters of the law; and therefore, the character he here gave of himſelf might be very juſt. For though he was far from being a perſon who feared God from his heart, he might have appeared in the ſight of men, as a perſon of a very fair character. And having maintained that character, notwithſtanding his great riches, he certainly deſerved commendation; and therefore might be loved by that benevolent perſon, who came from his Father, to redeem loſt mankind. But he was, at the ſame time, very faulty, with regard to his love of ſenſual pleaſures; a ſin, which might have eſcaped his own obſervation, though it could not eſcape the all-ſeeing eye of the Son of God. Our bleſſed Saviour, therefore, willing to make him ſenſible of his ſecret deſire of poſſeſſing the riches of this world, told him, that if he aimed at perfection he ſhould diſtribute his poſſeſſions among the poor and indigent, and become his diſciple. "If thou wilt be perfect, go and ſell that thou haſt, and give it to the poor, and thou ſhalt have treaſure in heaven: and come and follow me."

His heart being ſet upon his poſſeſſions, he had no inclination to a religion that enjoined ſelf-denial, and parting with our darling ſins. "But when the young man heard that ſaying, he went away ſorrowful: for he had great poſſeſſions." *Matt.* xix. 22.

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This melancholy inſtance of the pernicious influence of riches over the minds of the children of men, induced our bleſſed Saviour to caution his diſciples againſt fixing their minds on things of ſuch frightful tendency, by ſhewing how very difficult it was for a rich man to procure an habitation in the regions of eternal happineſs. "Verily, I ſay unto you, that a rich man ſhall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I ſay unto you, It is eaſier for a camel (i. e. a cable or a large rope) to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his diſciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, ſaying, Who then can be ſaved? But Jeſus beheld them, and ſaid unto them, With men this is impoſſible, but with God all things are poſſible." *Matt.* xix. 23, &c.

If man be not aſſiſted by the grace of God, it will be impoſſible for him to obtain the happy rewards of the kingdom of heaven: but by the aſſiſtance of grace, which the Almighty never refuſes to thoſe who ſeek it with their whole heart, it is very poſſible.

This anſwer of the bleſſed Jeſus was, however, far from ſatisfying his diſciples, who had, doubtleſs, often reflected with pleaſure on the high poſts they were to enjoy in their Maſter's kingdom. Peter ſeems particularly to have been diſappointed; and therefore addreſſed his Maſter in the name of the reſt, begging him to remember, that his apoſtles had actually done what the young man had refuſed. They had abandoned their relations, their friends, their poſſeſſions, and their employments, on his account: and therefore deſired to know what reward they were to expect for theſe inſtances of their obedience. To which Jeſus replied, That they ſhould not fail of a reward, even in this life; for immediately after his reſurrection, when he aſcended to his Father, and entered on his mediatorial office, they ſhould be advanced to the honour of judging the twelve tribes of Iſrael; that is, of ruling the church of Chriſt, which they were to plant in different parts of the earth. "Verily, I ſay unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of man ſhall ſit in the throne of his glory, ye alſo ſhall ſit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Iſrael." *Matt.* xix. 28.

Having given this anſwer to Peter,

he next mentioned the rewards his other diſciples ſhould receive, both in this world, and in that which is to come. They, ſaid he, who have forſaken all, for my ſake, ſhall be no loſers in the end; their benevolent Father, who intends to give them poſſeſſions in the heavenly Canaan, will not fail to ſupport them, during their long and painful journey to that happy country; and raiſe them up friends who ſhall aſſiſt them with thoſe neceſſaries they might have expected from their relations, had they not left them for my ſake. Divine Providence will take care they have every thing valuable that can be given them by their relations, or they could deſire from large poſſeſſions. They ſhall, indeed, be fed with the bread of ſorrow; but this ſhall produce joys, to which all the earthly pleaſures bear no proportion; and, in the end, obtain everlaſting life. They ſhall leave this vale of tears, with all its pains and ſorrows, behind them, and fly to the boſom of their Almighty Father, the fountain of life and joy, where they ſhall be infinitely rewarded for all the ſufferings they have undergone in this world.

Things ſhall then be reverſed, and thoſe who have been reviled and contemned on earth, for the ſake of the Goſpel, ſhall be exalted to honour, glory, and immortality; while the others ſhall be conſigned to eternal infamy. "But many that are firſt ſhall be laſt, and the laſt ſhall be firſt." *Matt.* xix. 30.

Theſe words ſeem alſo to have been ſpoken to keep the diſciples humble; for in all probability they at firſt underſtood the promiſe of their ſitting on twelve thrones, in a natural ſenſe; as they were ready to conſtrue every expreſſion, to a temporal kingdom, which they ſtill expected their maſter would erect upon earth.

Our bleſſed Saviour, therefore, to remove all thoughts they might entertain of this kind, told them, that though he had deſcribed the rewards they were to expect for the ready obedience they had ſhewn to his commands, and the pains they were to take in propagating the goſpel among the children of men; yet thoſe rewards were ſpiritual, and not confined to the Jews alone, but extended alſo to the Gentiles, who, in point of time, ſhould excel the Jews, and univerſally embrace the goſpel, before that nation was converted.

To excite their ardent preſſing forward in faith and good works, our

our Lord relates the parable of the houſholder, who, at different hours of the day, hired labourers to work in his vineyard. "The kingdom of heaven," ſays our bleſſed Saviour, "is like unto a houſholder, who went out early in the morning to hire labourers to work in his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers, for a penny a-day, he ſent them into his vineyard. And he went out, about the third hour, and ſaw others ſtanding idle in the market place, and ſaid unto them, go ye alſo into my vineyard, and whatſoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out, about the ſixth and ninth hour, and did likewiſe. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and finding others ſtanding idle, ſaid unto them, Why ſtand ye here all the day idle? They ſay unto him, becauſe no man hath hired us. He ſaith unto them, Go ye alſo into the vineyard, and whatſoever is right that ſhall ye receive. So, when even was come, the Lord of the vineyard ſaith unto his ſteward, call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the laſt unto the firſt. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the firſt came, they ſuppoſed that they ſhould have received more: and they likewiſe received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured againſt the good man of the houſe, ſaying, theſe laſt have wrought but one hour, and thou haſt made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he anſwered one of them, and ſaid, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didſt thou not agree with me for a penny? take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this laſt even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, becauſe I am good? So the laſt ſhall be firſt and the firſt laſt: for many be called but few choſen." *Matt.* xx. 1, 2, 3, &c.

Such is the parable of the houſeholder, as delivered by our Saviour; and, from the applications he has made of it, it will not be difficult to interpret it. The diſpenſation of religion, which God gave to mankind, in different parts of the world, are repreſented by the vineyard.—The Jews, who were early members of the true church, and obliged to obey the law of Moſes, are the labourers which the houſeholder hired early

early in the morning. The Gentiles who were converted at ſeveral times, by the various interpoſitions of Providence, to the knowledge and worſhip of the true God, are the labourers hired at the third, ſixth, and ninth hour. And the invitation given at the eleventh hour, implies the calling of perſons in the eve of life, to the knowledge of the goſpel. The law of Moſes was a heavy yoke; and therefore the obedience of its precepts was very elegantly repreſented, by bearing the heat and burden of the whole day. But the proſelyted Gentiles paid obedience only to ſome particular precepts of the law; bore but part of its weight; and were therefore repreſented by thoſe who were hired at the third, ſixth, and ninth hours: while thoſe heathens, who regulated their conduct, by the law of nature only, and eſteemed the works of juſtice, piety, temperance, and charity, as their whole duty, are beautifully repreſented as labouring only one hour, in the cool of the evening.

When the evening was come and each labourer was to receive his wages, they were all placed on an equal footing; theſe rewards being the privileges and advantages of the goſpel. The Jews, who had borne the grievous yoke of the Moſaic ceremonies, murmured when they found the Gentiles were admitted to its privileges, without being ſubject to their ceremonial worſhip. But we muſt not urge the circumſtance of the reward, ſo far as to fancy that either Jews or Gentiles merited the bleſſings of the goſpel, by their having laboured faithfully in the vineyard, or having behaved well under their ſeveral diſpenſations.

The glorious goſpel, with all its bleſſings, was beſtowed intirely by the free grace of God, and without any thing in men to merit it; beſides, it was offered promiſcuouſly to all, whether good or bad, and embraced by perſons of all characters. The concluſion of the parable deſerves our utmoſt attention; we ſhould often meditate upon it, and take care to make our calling and election ſure.

After Jeſus had finiſhed theſe diſcourſes, he continued his journey towards Jeruſalem, where the chief prieſts and elders, ſoon after the reſurrection of Lazarus, iſſued a proclamation, promiſing a reward to any one who ſhould apprehend him. In all probability, this was the reaſon why the diſciples were aſtoniſhed at the alacrity of our Lord, during this

this journey, while they themſelves followed him trembling. Jeſus, therefore, thought proper to repeat the prophecies concerning his ſufferings, in order to ſhew his diſciples that they were entirely voluntary; adding, that though the Jews ſhould put him to death, yet inſtead of weakening, it ſhould increaſe their faith, eſpecially as he would riſe again, the third day, from the dead. Behold, we go up to Jeruſalem, and all things that are written by the prophets, concerning the Son of man, ſhall be accompliſhed: "For he ſhall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and ſhall be mocked, and ſpitefully entreated and ſpitted on: and they ſhall ſcourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he ſhall riſe again." *Luke* xviii. 32, 33.

As this prediction manifeſtly tended to the confirmation of the ancient prophecies, it muſt have given the greateſt encouragement to his diſciples, had they underſtood and applied it in a proper manner; but they were ſo ignorant in the ſcriptures, that they had no idea of what he meant; "And they underſtood none of theſe things: and this ſaying was hid from them; neither knew they the things which were ſpoken."

The ſons of Zebedee were ſo ignorant, that they thought their Maſter, by his telling them he would riſe again from the dead, meant that he would then erect his empire, and accordingly begged that he would confer on them the chief poſts in his kingdom; which they expreſſed, by deſiring to be ſeated, the one "on his right hand, and the other on his left," in alluſion to his placing the twelve apoſtles upon the twelve thrones, judging the tribes of Iſrael.

This race, ever ſince our Saviour's transfiguration, had conceived very high notions of his kingdom, and poſſibly of their own merit alſo, becauſe they had been admitted to behold that miracle. But Jeſus told them, they were ignorant of the nature of the honour they requeſted; and ſince they deſired to ſhare with him in glory, aſked them, If they were willing to ſhare with him alſo in his ſufferings: "Ye know not what ye aſk; are ye able to drink of the cup that I ſhall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptiſm that I am baptized with?" *Matt.* x. 22.

The two diſciples, raviſhed with the proſpect of the dignity they were aſpiring after, replied, without he-

 ſitation

ſitation, that they were both able and willing to ſhare any hardſhip their Maſter might meet with, in the way to the kingdom. To which he anſwered, that they ſhould certainly ſhare with him his troubles and afflictions; but that they had aſked a favour which was not his to give. "Ye ſhall drink, indeed, of my cup, and be baptized with the baptiſm that I am baptized with; but to ſit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it ſhall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father," *Matt.* xx. 23.

This ambitious requeſt of the two brothers raiſed the indignation of the reſt of the diſciples, who thinking themſelves equally deſerving the principal poſts in the Meſſiah's kingdom, were highly offended at the arrogance of the ſons of Zebedee. Jeſus, therefore, in order to reſtore harmony among his diſciples, told them that his kingdom was very different from thoſe of the preſent world, and the greatneſs of his diſciples did not, like that of ſecular princes, conſiſt in reigning over others in an abſolute and deſpotic manner. "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exerciſe dominion over them, and they that are great, exerciſe authority upon them. But it ſhall not be ſo among you: but whoſoever will be great among you, let him be your miniſter; and whoſoever will be chief among you, let him be your ſervant: even as the Son of man came not to be miniſtered unto, but to miniſter, and to give his life a ranſom for many." *Matt.* xx. 25, &c. Ye know that rank and precedence denote merit of character here: but Chriſtian greatneſs and ſpiritual precedence conſiſt in humility, of which Chriſt your Saviour was made an eminent pattern.

CHAP. XXVIII.

The benevolent Saviour reſtores Sight to the Blind. Kindly regards Zaccheus the Publican. Delivers the Parable of the Servants intruſted with their Lord's Money. Makes a Public entry into Jeruſalem.

JESUS, with his diſciples, and the multitude that accompanied him, were now arrived at Jericho, a famous city of Paleſtine, and the ſecond in the kingdom. Near this town Jeſus cured two blind men, who ſat by the road begging, and expreſſed their belief in him as the Meſſiah. "And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. And behold, two blind men ſitting by the way-ſide, when they

they heard that Jeſus paſſed by, cried out, ſaying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David. And the multitude rebuked them, becauſe they ſhould hold their peace: but they cried the more, ſaying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David." *Matt.* xx. 29, &c.

This importunate requeſt had its deſired effect on the Son of God.—He ſtood ſtill, and called them to him, that, by their manner of walking, ſpectators might be convinced they were really blind. As ſoon as they approached him, he aſked them, What they requeſted with ſuch earneſtneſs? To which the beggars anſwered, that they might receive their ſight. "What will ye that I ſhall do unto you? (They ſay) Lord, that our eyes may be opened." This requeſt was not made in vain: their compaſſionate Saviour touched their eyes, and immediately they received ſight, and followed him, glorifying and praiſing God.

After conferring ſight on theſe beggars, Zaccheus, chief of the publicans, having often heard the fame of our Saviour's miracles, was deſirous of ſeeing his perſon; but the lowneſs of his ſtature preventing him from ſatisfying his curioſity, "he, ran before, and climbed up a ſycamore tree to ſee him, for he was to paſs that way. (As Jeſus approached the place where he was) he looked up and ſaw him, and ſaid unto him, Zaccheus, make haſte, and come down, for to day I muſt abide at thy houſe." *Luke* xix. 5.

The publican expreſſed his joy at our Lord's condeſcending to viſit him, took him to his houſe, and ſhewed him all the marks of civility in his power. But the people, when they ſaw he was going to the houſe of a publican, condemned his conduct, as not conformable to the character of a prophet. Zaccheus ſeems to have heard theſe unjuſt reflections; and, therefore, was willing to juſtify himſelf, before Jeſus and his attendants. "And Zaccheus ſtood, and ſaid unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by falſe accuſation, I reſtore him four fold. And Jeſus ſaid unto him, This day is ſalvation come to this houſe, foraſmuch as he alſo is the Son of Abraham," *Luke* xix. 8, &c.

Our Saviour, further to convince the people that the deſign of his miſſion was to ſeek and to reſtore life and ſalvation to loſt and periſhing ſinners, adds, "The Son of man

is

is come to ſeek and to ſave that which was loſt."

While Jeſus continued in the houſe of Zaccheus the publican, he ſpake a parable to his followers, who ſuppoſed, at his arrival in the royal city, he would erect the long-expected kingdom of the Meſſiah. "A certain nobleman (ſaid he) went into a far country to receive for himſelf a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten ſervants, and delivered them ten pounds, and ſaid unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and ſent a meſſage after him, ſaying, We will not have this man to reign over us. And it came to paſs that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded theſe ſervants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the firſt, ſaying, Lord, thy pounds hath gained ten pounds. And he ſaith unto him, Well, thou good ſervant: becauſe thou haſt been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the ſecond came, ſaying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he ſaid likewiſe to him, Be thou alſo over five cities. And another came, ſaying, Lord behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin; for I feared thee, becauſe thou art an auſtere man: thou takeſt up that thou laidſt not down, and reapeſt that thou didſt not ſow. And he ſaith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked ſervant. Thou kneweſt that I was an auſtere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not ſow: Wherefore then gaveſt not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with uſury? And he ſaid unto them that ſtood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds (and they ſaid unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds) For I ſay unto you, That unto every one which hath ſhall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath ſhall be taken away from him. But thoſe mine enemies, which would not that I ſhould reign over them, bring hither, and ſlay them before me." *Luke* xix. 12, &c.

In this parable we have the characters of three ſorts of men, delineated by our bleſſed Saviour himſelf; namely, the true diſciples of the Meſſiah; the hypocrites, and the openly prophane. And the treatment

treatment theſe ſervants met with repreſent the final ſentences that will be paſſed upon them, by the awful judge of the whole earth. The true diſciples ſhall be rewarded with the honours and pleaſures of immortality; the hypocrites ſtripped of all the advantages they ſo often boaſted, and loaded with eternal infamy; and the open enemies of Chriſt ſhall ſuffer puniſhment, ſevere in proportion to the degree of their guilt.

But though this is the general ſenſe of the parable, yet it has alſo a particular relation to the time when it was ſpoken; and intended to teach the diſciples, that though they might imagine the Meſſiah's kingdom was ſpeedily to be erected, and they were ſoon to partake of its happineſs, yet this was not to happen before the death of their maſter; that they themſelves muſt perform a long and laborious courſe of ſervices, before they received their eternal reward. That after his reſurrection, when he had obtained the kingdom, he would return from his ſeat of majeſty, and reckon with all his ſervants, and reward every one according to the improvements he had made in the truſt committed to his care: and that he would execute, in an exemplary manner, his vengeance on thoſe who refuſed to let him reign over them, and did all in their power to hinder the erection of his kingdom among others.

After ſpeaking this parable, Jeſus left the houſe of Zaccheus the publican, and continued his journey towards Jeruſalem, where he propoſed to celebrate the paſſover: he was earneſtly expected by the people, who came up to purify themſelves, and who began to doubt whether he would venture to come to the feaſt. This delay, however, was occaſioned by the proclamation iſſued by the chief prieſts, promiſing a reward to any who would diſcover the place of his refreſhment. "Now both the chief prieſts and the Phariſees had given a commandment, that if any man knew where he were, he ſhould ſhew it, that they might take him." *John* xi. 57.

Six days before the paſſover Jeſus arrived at Bethany, and repaired to the houſe of Lazarus, whom he had raiſed from the dead. "There they made him a ſupper, and Martha ſerved; but Lazarus was one of them that ſat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of ſpikenard, very coſtly, and anointed the feet of Jeſus, and wiped

his feet with her hair: and the houſe was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then ſaith one of his diſciples, Judas Iſcariot, Simon's ſon, which ſhould betray him, Why was not this ointment ſold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he ſaid, not that he cared for the poor; but becauſe he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then ſaid Jeſus, let her alone; againſt the day of my burying hath ſhe kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always." *John* xii. 2, &c.

As Bethany was not above two miles from Jeruſalem, the news of his arrival was ſoon ſpread through the capital, and great numbers of the citizens came to ſee Lazarus, who had been raiſed from the dead, together with the great prophet, who had wrought ſo ſtupendous a miracle, and many of them were convinced both of the reſurrection of the former, and the divinity of the latter: but the news of their converſion, together with the reaſon of it being currently reported in Jeruſalem, the chief prieſts were ſoon ſenſible of the weight ſo great a miracle muſt have on the minds of the people; and therefore determined, if poſſible, to put both Jeſus and Lazarus to death.

Our bleſſed Lord, though he knew the deſign of the Jews upon him, alſo knew that it became him to fulfil all righteouſneſs; and was ſo far from declining to viſit Jeruſalem, that he even entered it in a public manner. When they "were come to Bethpage, unto the mount of olives, then ſent Jeſus two diſciples, ſaying unto them, Go into the village over againſt you, and ſtraightway ye ſhall find an aſs tied, and a colt with her: looſe them and bring them unto me. And if any man ſay ought unto you, ye ſhall ſay, The Lord hath need of them; and ſtraightway he will ſend them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was ſpoke by the prophet, ſaying, Tell ye the daughters of Zion, Behold, thy king cometh unto thee, meek, and ſitting upon an aſs, and a colt the fole of an aſs. And the diſciples went and did as Jeſus commanded them, and brought the aſs, and the colt, and put on them their cloaths, and they ſet him thereon. And a very great multitude ſpread their garments in the way: others cut down branches from the trees, and ſtrewed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed

followed, cried, ſaying, Hoſanna to the Son of David: bleſſed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord, Hoſanna in the higheſt.—And when he was come into Jeruſalem, all the city was moved, ſaying, Who is this? And the multitude ſaid, This is Jeſus, the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee."

Some of the weakeſt of the deiſtical tribe have endeavoured to turn this circumſtance into ridicule; but in this they diſcover the height of ignorance, becauſe they judge by the prejudices of our own times and country. And when thoſe who look no farther than the manner and the cuſtoms before them, examine this part of the ſacred ſtory by the ſtandard of modern prejudices, they ſee, or think they ſee, ſomething quite inconſiſtent with the gravity and dignity of the perſon, pretending to be king of the Jews, when Chriſt is repreſented entering in triumph into Jeruſalem, ſitting on an aſs. But however contemptible an aſs, or a man riding on that creature may be at preſent, it was not ſo from the beginning. In many countries, and particularly in Judea, perſons of the higheſt diſtinction uſually rode upon aſſes. The governors of Iſrael are deſcribed in the ſong of Deborah, as "riding on white aſſes." *Judges* v. 10. And the thirty ſons of Jair, who was judge and prince over Iſrael twenty-two years, are ſaid to ride on thirty aſſes. *Judges* x. 4. And another judge is recorded to have had forty ſons, and thirty nephews, that rode on ſeventy aſs colts. *Judges* xii 14.

It may, however, be aſked, ſuppoſing it was a uſual thing to ride on an aſs, why ſhould this common practice be mentioned in relation to the Meſſiah, as a mark of diſtinction? Might not the prophet, upon this ſuppoſition, as well have ſaid, he ſhall come walking on foot? and would he not have been as well known by one character as by the other? Beſides, if we turn to the book of Zachariah, where this prophecy is to be found, we ſhall ſee the perſon there deſcribed to be a king, a juſt king, and one having ſalvation: and what is there in this character of riding on the fole of an aſs that is peculiar to a king, to a juſt king, and to one who was to bring ſalvation and deliverance to his people?

Theſe queſtions, however difficult they may at firſt ſight appear, are eaſily anſwered, not by conſidering the ſtate and condition of kings

kings in general, but that peculiar to a king of Iſrael, on which the propriety of this character is founded.

If we look into the hiſtory of the riſe and fall of nations, we ſhall generally find, that their proſperity and ſucceſs were proportioned to the force and power, and to the conduct and ability of their leaders.—But with the Jews, who, from ſlaves in Egypt, became a powerful people, the caſe was very different.—The beſt and greateſt of their kings, and he who carried their empire to its greateſt height, has left us another account of their affairs: "The people (ſays he) got not the land in poſſeſſion by their own ſword, neither did their own arm ſave them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, becauſe thou hadſt a favour unto them." *Pſalm* xliv. 3, &c.

When we read theſe, and other ſimilar paſſages, we are apt to aſcribe them to the piety and devotion of the pſalmiſt, to conſider them only as acknowledgments of God's general providence in the affairs of the world, and hence are apt to overlook, or not ſufficiently conſider, the hiſtorical truth they contain.

It is true, indeed, that all ſucceſs, in the ſtricteſt ſenſe, may be aſcribed to God; that it is he who giveth victory unto kings: but he generally makes uſe of natural means, and it is no offence to his providence, that kings liſt their thouſands of horſe and foot, to ſecure themſelves and their dominions. But with the Jews it was very different: they were never ſo weak as when they made themſelves ſtrong; never ſo certainly ruined, as when their force was great enough to create a confidence in themſelves. For God had taken the defence of Iſrael upon himſelf; and whenever the people took it out of his hands, to place it in their own, they were ſure to be undone.

Nay, ſo tender was God of his honour in this reſpect, and ſo concerned to juſtify his promiſe to protect Iſrael, in the eyes of the world, that he would not always permit natural cauſes to interfere in their deliverance, leſt the people ſhould grow doubtful to whom they ought to aſcribe their victories; and for the ſame reaſon it was, that he commanded the people to have neither horſes nor chariots of war for their defence. Not becauſe they were thought uſeleſs in war, for it is well known they were the ſtrength of the ancient kingdoms, but becauſe God himſelf

himſelf had undertaken their defence, and he wanted neither horſe nor foot to fight their battles.

This law, as is evident from the Jewiſh hiſtory, was obſerved for near four hundred years, namely, till about the middle of Solomon's reign. And while David ſwayed the ſceptre of Iſrael, when the kingdom was carried to its utmoſt height, he himſelf rode upon a mule, and provided no better equipage for his ſon, on the day of his coronation. "Cauſe Solomon, my ſon, (ſaid David) to ride upon my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. And let Zadok the prieſt, and Nathan the prophet, anoint him there king over Iſrael." 1 *Kings* i. 33, 34. And when that pious prince looked back, and contemplated this ſtate of things, he might well ſay, "Some truſt in chariots, and ſome in horſes; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." *Pſal.* xx. 7.

In the reign of Solomon things quickly changed their aſpect. He married the daughter of the king of Egypt, and opened a commerce between that country and his own, by which means he ſoon acquired an immenſe number of horſes and chariots; and all his ſucceſſors, when they had it in their power, followed his example. But what did the kingdom gain by this change? They were, before, a rich and flouriſhing people; but after breaking this law of the moſt high, their wealth and power gradually declined, till at laſt their habitations were laid waſte, their temple and cities burnt with fire, and they themſelves carried captive into a ſtrange land.

It may perhaps, be aſked, wherein the guilt of having a country full of horſes conſiſted; There is certainly no moral crime in purchaſing and keeping theſe creatures; but the kings of Iſrael were exalted to the throne, on condition that they ſhould renounce the aſſiſtance of chariots and horſes, and depend upon God for ſucceſs in the day of battle.

Having thus conſidered this law, and the conſequences that reſulted from the breach of it, let us now look back to the prophecy relating to the Meſſiah. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion: ſhout, O daughter of Jeruſalem: behold, thy king cometh unto thee: he is juſt, and having ſalvation, lowly, and riding upon an aſs, and upon a colt the foſe of an aſs. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horſe from Jeruſalem." *Zach.* ix. 9, &c.

Such is the king who was to ſave the deſcendants of Jacob: and what ſort of a king could be expected? Is it poſſible to imagine that God would ſend a king to ſave them who ſhould be like the kings who had undone them? Is it not more reaſonable to think, that he would reſemble thoſe who had been deliverers of their country? Kings who feared God, and therefore feared no enemy; who, though mounted on aſſes, and colts the foles of aſſes, were able to put to flight the thouſands and ten thouſands of chariots and horſe that came againſt them.

The king, foretold by the prophet, was alſo to be juſt, meek, and lowly; but how could he have deſerved that character, had he appeared in the pride and pomp of war, ſurrounded with horſes and chariots, in direct oppoſition to the law of God? or, as he was to bring ſalvation to the people, could he make uſe of thoſe means which God never had proſpered, and which he declared he never would?

It appears then, that it was eſſential to the character of a king of Iſrael, who was to be juſt and lowly, and to bring ſalvation with him, that he ſhould come riding on an aſs, and a colt the fole of an aſs; but if any doubt can yet remain, let the prophet himſelf explain it, who immediately after the deſcription of the promiſed king, adds, "and I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horſe from Jeruſalem:" plainly intimating, that the character given of the Meſſiah, that he ſhould ride on an aſs, was in oppoſition to the pride of their warlike kings, who, by their great ſtrength, in chariots and horſes, had ruined themſelves and their people.

Thus have we undeniably ſhewn the intention of the prophet, when he foretold, that the Meſſiah ſhould ride on an aſs; and from hence it appears, that the enemies of revelation have not the leaſt reaſon for turning this tranſaction into ridicule. Was it any reproach to Chriſt to ride into Jeruſalem on the fole of an aſs, when David, the greateſt of his anceſtors, and Solomon, the wiſeſt, as long as he was wiſe, rode in the ſame manner? Can the Jews object to this circumſtance, and yet talk of the glories of David, and the magnificence of Solomon, who, in the midſt of all that glory and magnificence, did the very ſame thing? Or can they ſtumble at this character of the Meſſiah, without forgetting

forgetting by what princes their anceſtors were ſaved, and by what undone?

But to leave this digreſſion. The prodigious multitude that now accompanied Jeſus filled the Phariſees and great men with malice and envy, becauſe every method they had taken to hinder the people from following Jeſus had proved ineffectual. "The Phariſees therefore ſaid among themſelves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold, the world is gone after him." *John* xii. 19.

But when our bleſſed Saviour drew near the city of Jeruſalem, ſurrounded by the rejoicing multitude, notwithſtanding the many affronts he had there received, he beheld the city, and with a divine generoſity and benevolence, which nothing can equal, wept over it, and, in the moſt pathetic manner, lamented the calamities which he foreſaw were coming upon it, becauſe its inhabitants were ignorant of the time of their viſitation. "If (ſaid he) thou hadſt known, even thou, at leaſt in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days ſhall come upon thee, that thine enemies ſhall caſt a trench about thee, and compaſs thee round, and keep thee on every ſide, And ſhall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they ſhall not leave in thee one ſtone upon another: becauſe thou knoweſt not the time of thy viſitation." *Luke* xix. 42, &c.

Behold here, ye wandering mortals, behold an example and generoſity infinitely ſuperior to any furniſhed by the heathen world! An example highly worthy for them to imitate and admire!

When Jeſus, ſurrounded by the multitude, entered Jeruſalem, the whole city was moved on account of the prodigious concourſe of people that accompanied him, and their continual acclamations. Jeſus rode immediately to the temple; but it being evening, he ſoon left the city, to the great diſcouragement of the people, who expected he was immediately to have taken into his hands the reins of government. "And Jeſus entered into Jeruſalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve." *Mark* xi. 11.

CHAP. XXIX.

Jeſus pronounces a Curſe upon the Fig-Tree. Expels

Expels the Profaners of the Temple. Aſſerts his Divine Authority, and delivers two Parables.

AT the earlieſt dawn our bleſſed Saviour left Bethany to viſit again the capital of Judea. And as he purſued his journey, he ſaw, at a diſtance, a fig-tree, which from its fulneſs of leaves, promiſed abundance of fruit. This inviting object induced him to approach it, in expectation of finding figs, for he was hungry, and the ſeaſon for gathering them was not yet arrived; but on his coming to the tree, he found it to be really barren: upon which the bleſſed Jeſus ſaid to it, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever." *Matt.* xxi. 19.

This action, which was purely emblematical, and prefigured the ſpeedy ruin of the jewiſh nation, on account of its unfruitfulneſs, under all the advantages it then enjoyed, has, by the enemies of revelation, been repreſented as an action unbecoming the Redeemer of mankind. But if they had fully conſidered its intention, they would have been convinced, that, like the reſt of his miracles, it was done with a gracious intention; to waken his countrymen from their lethargy, and, by repentance, prevent the total ruin of their church and nation.

Being diſappointed in not finding fruit on the fig-tree, our bleſſed Saviour purſued his journey to Jeruſalem; and, on his arrival, went ſtraitway to the temple, the outer court of which he found full of merchandize. A ſight like this vexed his meek and righteous ſoul, ſo that he drove them all out of the temple, overturned the tables of the money-changers, and the ſeats of them that ſold doves, and would not ſuffer any veſſel to be carried through the temple, ſaying unto them, "It is written, My houſe ſhall be called the houſe of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves." *Matt.* xxi. 13.

St. Jerome conſiders this as one of the greateſt of all our Saviour's miracles. And it muſt be owned that the circumſtances are very extraordinary; that one man ſhould undertake ſo bold, and execute ſo hazardous a taſk.—One man without a commiſſion from Ceſar; without any countenance from the Jewiſh rulers; without any arms either to terrify the multiude, or defend himſelf—That he ſhould caſt out the whole tribe of mercenary traffickers, wreſt from thoſe worſhippers of wealth their darling idol; and trample under foot their great

Diana

Diana—And all this without tumult or oppoſition; not one of the ſacrilegious rabble daring to move the hand, or open the mouth.

Whoever, I ſay, reflects on the fierce and ungovernable nature of an enraged populace, or conſiders the outrageous zeal of Demetrias, and the craftſmen, on a leſs irritating occaſion, may poſſibly find himſelf almoſt, if not altogether, of the Latin father's opinion.

There is a tradition, that a certain bright and dazzling luſtre flamed from his eyes, which they were unable to bear, as the people could not behold the face of Moſes, for the glory that ſurrounded him. But as the ſcriptures take no notice of this tranſcendent luſtre, we muſt only adore the greatneſs of the fact, and, at the ſame time, ſo improve this miracle to our ſpiritual advantage, as to ſecure, by accepting his grace, the power of this mighty reformer on our ſides, that when he ſhall come in glory, we may be ſafe under the ſhadow of his Almighty wings, while he takes fearful vengeance on thoſe, who proſtitute the moſt ſacred places to mercenary purpoſes.

Having diſperſed this venal clan, the people brought unto him the blind, the lame, and the diſeaſed, who were all healed by the Son of God; ſo that the very children, when they ſaw the many miraculous cures he performed, proclaimed him to be the great Son of David, the long-expected Meſſiah.

Such behaviour not a little incenſed the Phariſees; but they feared the people, and therefore only aſked him, if he heard what the children ſaid? inſinuating, that he ought to rebuke them, and not ſuffer them thus to load him with the higheſt praiſes. But Jeſus inſtead of giving a direct anſwer to their queſtion, repeated a paſſage out of the eight pſalm. "Have ye never read (ſaid the bleſſed Jeſus) out of the mouths of babes and ſucklings haſt thou ordained ſtrength? Giving them to underſtand, that the meaneſt of God's works have been made inſtrumental in ſpreading his praiſe,

The evening being now come, Jeſus, with his diſciples, left the city, and retired to Bethany, where his benevolent miracle, in raiſing Lazarus from the dead, had procured him many friends, among whom he was always in ſafety. The next morning as they were returning from Jeruſalem, the diſciples were aſtoniſhed at beholding the fig-tree

that had been, but the morning before, declared barren, "dried up from the roots:" they had, in all probability, forgotten what our Saviour had ſaid to this fig-tree, till its dry and withered aſpect brought it again to their memory. Peter, on ſeeing this aſtoniſhing phœnomenon, ſaid unto Jeſus, "Maſter, behold the fig-tree which thou curſedſt is withered away!" To which Jeſus anſwered, that whoever had faith in the Almighty, or thoroughly believed in his miracles, ſhould be able to do much greater things than the withering of the fig-tree. "And Jeſus anſwering, ſaith unto them, have faith in God. For verily I ſay unto you, that whoſoever ſhall ſay unto this mountain, be thou removed, and be thou caſt into the ſea, and ſhall not doubt in his heart, but ſhall believe that thoſe things which he ſaith ſhall come to paſs, he ſhall have whatſoever he ſaith." *Mark* xi. 22, 23.

Our Lord added, that whatſoever they ſhould aſk by faith, they ſhould receive; and concluded by giving them direction concerning prayer, which was neceſſary to increaſe the faith he mentioned. "And when ye ſtand, praying, forgive, if ye have ought againſt any: that your Father alſo which is in heaven may forgive you your treſpaſſes. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your treſpaſſes." *Mark* xi. 25, 26.

During the time the bleſſed Jeſus remained in the temple, certain proſelyted Greeks, who came up to worſhip at Jeruſalem, deſired to ſee him, having long cheriſhed expectations of beholding the promiſed Meſſiah. Accordingly, they applied to Philip, a native of Bethſaida, who mentioned it to Andrew, and he told it to Jeſus. Upon which our bleſſed Saviour told his diſciples, that he ſhould ſoon be honoured with the converſion of the Gentiles: "The hour is come (ſaid he) that the Son of man ſhould be glorified." But declared, that before this glorious event happened, he muſt ſuffer death; illuſtrating the neceſſity there was of his dying, by the ſimilitude of caſting grain into the earth.—"Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." *John* xii. 24. Adding, that ſince it was abſolutely neceſſary for him, their Lord and Maſter, to ſuffer the pains of death before he aſcended

aſcended the throne of his glory; ſo they, as his followers, muſt alſo expect to be perſecuted and ſpitefully uſed for his nameſake; but if they perſevered, and even reſolved to loſe their lives in his ſervice, he would reward their conſtancy with a crown of glory. At the ſame time he tacitly inſinuated, that the ſtrangers, if their deſire of converſing with him proceeded from a deſire of obtaining from him temporal preferments, would find themſelves ſadly diſappointed. "If any man ſerve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there ſhall alſo my ſervant be: if any man ſerve me, him will my Father honour." *John* xii. 26.

This mournful ſcene ſo greatly moved him, that he uttered in a very pathetic manner, his grief, and addreſſed his heavenly Father for ſuccour in his diſtreſs. "Now is my ſoul troubled; and what ſhall I ſay? Father, ſave me from this hour. But for this cauſe came I unto this hour." *John* xii. 27.

This ſhould teach us, that prayer is the only method of eaſing the mind overwhelmed with diſtreſs: but at the ſame time to be always reſigned to the divine will; for tho' the weakneſs of human nature may ſhrink when perſecution or ſufferings of any kind appear, yet by reflecting on the wiſdom, goodneſs, and power of God to deliver us, we ought to ſupport every trial, however ſevere, with patience, as he doubtleſs propoſes ſome happy end by theſe afflictions.

Our bleſſed Lord having made a ſhort prayer to his Father, begged of God to demonſtrate the truth of his miſſion by ſome token which could not be reſiſted. "Father, glorify thy name." Nor had he hardly uttered theſe words, before he was anſwered by an audible voice from heaven, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." The miracles thou haſt already performed have glorified my name; and I will ſtill continue to glorify it, by other miracles to be wrought before the ſons of men.

This voice was evidently preternatural, reſembling thunder in loudneſs, but ſufficiently articulate to be underſtood by thoſe who heard our bleſſed Saviour pray to his heavenly Father, And Jeſus told his diſciples that it was not given for his ſake, but to confirm them in their faith of his miſſion, "This voice (ſaid he) came not becauſe of me, but for your ſakes." It came to confirm

firm what I have told you relating to my ſufferings, death, reſurrection, and the converſion of the whole Gentile world to Chriſtian religion.

Accordingly, he communicated this comfortable reflection to his diſciples; telling them the time was at hand, when the kingdom of ſatan ſhould be deſtroyed, and that of the Meſſiah exalted. "Now is the judgment of this world: now ſhall the prince of this world be caſt out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." *John* xii. 31, &c.

The people, not underſtanding the force of this affirmation, replied, "We have heard, out of the law, that Chriſt abideth for ever: and how ſayeſt thou The Son of man muſt be lifted up?" *John* xii. 34. Our Lord, in anſwer, told them, that they ſhould ſoon be deprived of his preſence and miracles; and, therefore, they would do well to liſten attentively to his precepts, firmly believe the doctrine he delivered, and wiſely improve them to their eternal advantage; for otherwiſe they would be ſoon overtaken with ſpiritual blindneſs, and rendered incapable of inheriting the promiſes of the goſpel. That while they enjoyed the benefit of his preaching and miracles, which ſufficiently proved the truth of his miſſion from the Moſt High, they ſhould believe on him; for by that means alone they could become the children of God. "Yet a little while is the light with you; walk while ye have the light, leſt darkneſs come upon you: for he that walketh in darkneſs knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have the light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light." *John* xii. 35, &c.

Having thus addreſſed the multitude, he retired privately from Jeruſalem, probably to Bethany. But, notwithſtanding the many miracles our great Redeemer had wrought in preſence of theſe perverſe and ſtiff-necked people, the generality of them refuſed to own him for the Meſſiah; being filled with the vain expectations of a temporal prince, who was to rule over all the kingdoms of the earth, and place his throne in Jeruſalem. Some, indeed, even of the rulers, believed on him, though they thought it prudent to conceal their faith, leſt they ſhould, like the blind man, be excommunicated, or put out of the ſynagogue: valuing the good opinion of men above the approbation of the Almighty. Never-

Nevertheleſs, to inſpire ſuch as believed on him with courage, he cried in the temple, "He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that ſent me." He that acknowledges the divinity of my miſſion, acknowledges the power and grace of God, on whoſe ſpecial errand I am thus ſent. Adding, he that ſeeth the miracles I perform, ſeeth the operations of that Omnipotent Power by which I act. I am the ſun of righteouſneſs, whoſe beams diſpel the darkneſs of ignorance in which the ſons of men are involved, and am come to deliver all who believe on me out of that palpable darkneſs. You muſt not, however, expect, that I will at preſent execute my judgment upon thoſe who refuſe to embrace the doctrines of the goſpel; for I am not come to condemn and puniſh, but to ſave the world, and conſequently to try every gentle and winning method to reclaim the wicked from the error of their ways, and turn their feet into the paths of life and ſalvation. They ſhall not, however, eſcape unpuniſhed, who neglect the inſtructions and offers of ſalvation now made to them, ; for the doctrine I have preached ſhall bear witneſs againſt them at the awful tribunal of the laſt day; and as it has aggravated their ſin, ſo it ſhall then heighten their puniſhment.

While Jeſus was thus preaching in the temple, a deputation of prieſts and elders was ſent from the ſupreme council, to aſk him concerning the nature of the authority by which he acted, whether it was a prophet, prieſt, or king, as no other perſon had a right to make any alterations, either in church or ſtate? And if he laid claim to either of thoſe characters, from whom he received it? But our bleſſed Saviour, inſtead of giving a direct anſwer to the queſtions of the Phariſees, aſked them another; promiſing, if they reſolved his queſtion he would alſo anſwer theirs. "I alſo will aſk you one thing, which if ye tell me, I likewiſe will tell you by what authority I do theſe things. The baptiſm of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men." *Matt.* xxi. 24, &c.

This queſtion puzzled the prieſts. They conſidered, on the one hand, that if it was from God, it would oblige them to acknowledge the authority of Jeſus, John having, more than once, publicly declared him to be the Meſſiah: and on the other, if they peremptorily denied the authority of John, they would be in danger of being ſtoned by the peo-

ple, who, in general, conſidered him as a prophet. They, therefore, thought it the moſt eligible method to anſwer, that they could not tell from whence John's baptiſm was.

Thus, by declining to anſwer the queſtion aſked them by Jeſus, they left him at liberty to decline giving the council the ſatisfaction they had ſent to demand. At the ſame time they plainly confeſſed, that they were unable to paſs any ſentence on John the Baptiſt, notwithſtanding he claimed the character of a meſſenger from God, and they had ſent to examine his pretenſions.—This was, in effect, to acknowledge that they were incapable of judging of any prophet whatſoever. Well, therefore, might the bleſſed Jeſus ſay, "Neither tell I you by what authority I do theſe things." You have no right to aſk, ſince you have confeſſed you are unable to judge; and, therefore, I ſhall not ſatisfy your impertinent enquiry.

But becauſe this deputation had ſaid, that they were ignorant from whence the baptiſm of John was, our bleſſed Saviour ſharply rebuked them, conveying his reproof in the parable of the two ſons commanded to work in their father's vineyard, and aſking their opinion of the two, made them condemn themſelves.

"A certain man, (ſaid he) had two ſons, and he came to the firſt and ſaid, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." But this ungracious youth very roughly anſwered the kind command of his father, and without the leaſt preface, or appellation of reſpect anſwered, "I will not." However, after reflecting on the impropriety and indecency of ſuch behaviour to his kind and indulgent father, he repented of what he had done, and went to work in the vineyard. The father having met with ſo ſharp a reply from the former ſon, had recourſe to the other, and in the ſame manner ordered him to work that day in his vineyard.

This ſon was very different from the former, and, in a very dutiful manner, ſaid, "I go, Sir." But notwithſtanding this ſeeming obedience, he delayed to do as his father deſired; he did not go to work in the vineyard. The temper and behaviour of this ſecond ſon were exactly comformable to that of the Phariſees. They gave the Almighty the moſt honourable titles, and profeſſed the utmoſt zeal for his ſervice, in their prayers and praiſes; but at the ſame time refuſed to do any part of the

the work tha he enjoined them. In the character of the other ſon, the diſpoſition of the publicans and harlots is well deſcribed. They neither profeſſed or promiſed to do the will of their Creator; but when they came to reflect ſeriouſly on their conduct, and the offers of mercy which were ſo kindly made them, they ſubmitted to our Saviour, and, in conſequence of their faith, amended their lives.

Having thus finiſhed the parables, our Lord aſked the Phariſees, "Whether of them twain did the will of his Father? They ſay unto him, The firſt." They did not immediately perceive, that by this anſwer they condemned themſelves, till our Saviour made a juſt application of the parable, in this ſharp, but juſt rebuke, "Verily, I ſay unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteouſneſs, and ye believed him not," nor entered into your Father's vineyard, though, like the ſecond ſon, promiſed in the moſt fair and candid manner; "but the publicans and the harlots believed him," repented of their former diſobedience, and entered into the vineyard.

The bleſſed Jeſus did not only rebuke them for rejecting the preaching of the Baptiſt, but repreſented the crime of the nation, in rejecting all the prophets which had been ſent ſince they became a nation, among the reſt, the only begotten Son of the Moſt High; warning them, at the ſame time, of their danger, and the puniſhment that would inevitably enſue, if they continued in their rebellion. The outward œconomy of religion, in which they gloried, would be taken from them, their relation to God, as his people, cancelled, and the national conſtitution deſtroyed; but becauſe theſe topics were extremely diſagreeable, he delivered them under the veil of the following parable: "There was (ſaid he) a certain houſholder which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a wine preſs in it, and built a tower, and let it out to huſbandmen, and went into a far country."

The compariſon of the church to a vineyard is frequent in the ſacred ſcripture, but this particular parable, for the fuller conviction of the Jews, is expreſsly taken from the fifth chapter of the prophet Iſaiah, with which they could not fail of being well acquainted, nor ignorant of its

its meaning, as the prophet, at the end of it, adds, "The vineyard of the Lord of hoſts is the houſe of Iſrael, and the men of Judah his pleaſant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppreſſion: for righteouſneſs, but behold a cry." Our Saviour, therefore, continued the metaphor, telling them, "that when the time of the fruit drew near, he ſent his ſervants that they might receive the fruits of it. And the huſbandmen took his ſervants, and beat one and killed another, and ſtoned another." The Almighty ſent the prophets to exhort the Jews to entertain juſt ſentiments of religion, and tread the paths of virtue; but the Jews, irritated at the prophets for the freedom they uſed in reproving their ſins, perſecuted and ſlew them with unrelenting fury.

Their wickedneſs, however, in killing theſe meſſengers, did not inſtantly provoke the Almighty to pour down his vengeance upon them; he ſent more prophets to exhort and reclaim them, but they met with no better fate than the former. His mercy, however, ſtill continued, and that no means might be left untried, he ſent unto them his own Son, whoſe authority being clearly eſtabliſhed by undeniable miracles, ought to have been acknowledged chearfully by theſe wicked men; but how different was the conſequence? "When the huſbandmen ſaw the ſon, they ſaid among themſelves, This is the heir come, let us kill him, and let us ſeize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and caſt him out of the vineyard, and ſlew him. When the Lord, therefore, of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto thoſe huſbandmen? They ſay unto him, He will miſerably deſtroy thoſe wicked men, and let out his vineyard unto other huſbandmen, which ſhall render him the fruits in their ſeaſons." *Matt.* xxi. 38, &c.

Shocked at this awful repreſentation, the Phariſees exclaimed, and ſaid, "God forbid;" ſurely theſe huſbandmen will not proceed to ſuch deſperate iniquity; ſurely the vineyard will not thus be taken from them. But, to confirm the truth of this, our Saviour added a remarkable prophecy of himſelf, and his rejection, from the 118th Pſalm.—"Did you never (ſaid he) read in the ſcriptures, the ſtone which the builders rejected, the ſame is become the head of the corner; this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?"

The

The rejection of the Meſſiah by the Jews, and the reception he met with among the Gentiles, all brought to paſs by the providence of God, are wonderful events; and therefore I ſay unto you, the kingdom of God ſhall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

The Chief Prieſts and Phariſees being afraid to apprehend Jeſus, he was at liberty to proceed in the offices of his miniſtry: accordingly, he delivered another parable, wherein he deſcribed on the one hand, the bad ſucceſs which the preaching of the goſpel was to meet with among the Jews; and, on the other, the chearful reception given it among the Gentiles. This gracious deſign of the Almighty, in giving the goſpel to the children of men, our bleſſed Saviour, illuſtrated by the behaviour of a certain king, who, in honour of his ſon, made a great feaſt, to which he invited many gueſts. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his ſon." This marriage ſupper, or great feaſt, ſignifies the joys of heaven, which are properly compared to an elegant entertainment, on account of their exquiſiteneſs and duration; and are here ſaid to be prepared in honour of the Son of God, becauſe they are beſtowed on men in conſequence of his ſuffering in their ſtead, and behalf.

Some time before the ſupper was ready, the ſervants were ſent forth to call the gueſts to the wedding: i. e. when the fulneſs of time approached, the Jews, as being the peculiar people of God, were firſt called by John the Baptiſt, and afterwards by Chriſt himſelf; but they refuſed all theſe benevolent calls of mercy, and rejected the kind invitations of the goſpel, though preſſed by the preaching of the Meſſiah, and his forerunner. After our Saviour's reſurrection and aſcenſion, the apoſtles were ſent forth to inform the Jews, that the goſpel-covenant was eſtabliſhed, manſions in heaven prepared, and nothing wanting but the chearful acceptance of the honour deſigned them. "Again he ſent forth other ſervants, ſaying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage." But theſe meſſengers were as unſucceſsful as the former. The Jews, undervaluing the favour offered them, mocked at the meſ-

ſage; and ſome of them, more rude than the reſt, inſulted, beat, and ſlew the ſervants that had been ſent to call them to the marriage ſupper of the lamb. "But when the king heard thereof, he was wrath; and he ſent forth his armies, and deſtroyed thoſe murderers, and burnt up their city." This part of the parable plainly predicted the deſtruction of the Jews by the Roman armies, called here the armies of the Almighty, becauſe they were appointed by him to execute vengeance on that once favourite, but now rebellious people.

The Jews having thus rejected the benevolent calls of the goſpel, the king again ſent forth his ſervants into the countries of the Gentiles, with orders to compel all that they met with to come in to the marriage. This was immediately done, and the wedding was furniſhed with gueſts; but when the king came into the apartment, "he ſaw there a man, which had not on a wedding garment; and he ſaith unto him, Friend, how cameſt thou in hither, not having a wedding garment? And he was ſpeechleſs. Then ſaid the king to the ſervants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and caſt him into outer darkneſs: there ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of teeth. For many are called, but few are choſen." *Matt.* xxii. 11, &c.

By the concluſion of the parable we learn, that the profeſſion of the chriſtian religion will not ſave a man, unleſs he acts from chriſtian principles. Let us, therefore, who have obeyed the call, and are by profeſſion the people of God, think often on that awful day, when the king will come in to ſee his gueſts, when the Almighty will, with the greateſt ſtrictneſs, view every ſoul that lays claim to the joys of heaven. Let us think of the ſpeechleſs confuſion that will ſeize ſuch as have not on the wedding garment, and of the inexorable anxiety with which they will be conſigned to weeping and gnaſhing of teeth: and let us remember, that to have ſeen, for a while, the light of the goſpel, and the fair beamings of an eternal hope will add deeper and more ſenſible horrors to theſe gloomy caverns. On the other hand, to animate and encourage us, let us anticipate the joyful hour which will conſign us to bliſs immortal.

CHAP. XXX.

The bleſſed Jeſus wiſely Retorts on the Phariſees and Sadduces, who propound an intricate

cate Queſtion to him. Settles the moſt important Point of the Law. Enforces his Miſſion and Doctrine; and foretels the Judgment that would fall upon the Phariſaical Tribe.

THIS repreſentation of the ſtate of the finally impenitent, appearing to be levelled at the Phariſees, they immediately concerted with the Herodians, or Sadduces, on the moſt proper method of putting Jeſus to death. It is ſufficiently evident, that their hatred was now carried to the higheſt pitch, becauſe the moſt violent enmity which had ſo long ſubſiſted between the two ſects was, on this occaſion, ſuſpended, and they joined together to execute this cruel determination of the Son of God. They, however, thought it moſt eligible to act very cautiouſly, and endeavour, if poſſible, to catch ſome haſty expreſſion from him, that they might render him odious to the people, and procure ſomething againſt him, that might ſerve as a baſis for a perſecution. Accordingly, they ſent ſome of their diſciples to him, with orders to feign themſelves juſt men, who maintained the greateſt veneration for the divine law, and dreaded nothing more than the doing any thing inconſiſtent with its precepts; and, under this ſpecious cloak of hypocriſy, to beg his determination of an affair that had long lain heavy on their conſciences; namely, the paying tribute to Cæſar, which they thought inconſiſtent with their zeal for religion.

This queſtion was, it ſeems, furiouſly debated in our Saviour's time; one Judas, a native of Galilee, having inſpired the people with a notion that taxes to a foreign power were abſolutely unlawful. A doctrine ſo pleaſing to the worldly-minded Jews could not fail of friends, eſpecially among the lower claſs, and therefore muſt have many partizans among the multitude that then ſurrounded the Son of God.——The prieſts, therefore, imagined that it was not in his power to decide the point, without rendering himſelf obnoxious to ſome of the parties: if he ſhould ſay it was lawful to pay the taxes, they believed that the people, in whoſe hearing the queſtion was propoſed, would be incenſed againſt him, not only as a baſe pretender, who, on being attacked, publickly renounced the character of the Meſſiah, which he had aſſumed among his friends, but alſo as a flatterer of princes, and a betrayer of the liberties of his country, one who taught a doctrine inconſiſtent

ſiſtent with the known privileges of the people of God: but if he ſhould affirm that it was unlawful to pay tribute, they determined to inform the governor, who they hoped would puniſh him as a former of ſedition. Highly elated with their project, they accordingly came; and after paſſing an encomium on the truth of his miſſion, his courage, and impartiality, they propoſed this famous queſtion; "Maſter (ſaid they) we know that thou art true, and careſt for no man: for thou regardeſt not the perſon of men, but teacheſt the way of God in truth. Tell us, therefore, what thinkeſt thou, Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæſar or not?" *Mark* xii. 14.

But the bleſſed Jeſus ſaw their ſecret intentions, and accordingly called them hypocrites, to ſignify, that though they made conſcience, and a regard for the divine will, their pretence for propoſing this queſtion, he ſaw through the thin veil that concealed their deſign from the eyes of mortals, and knew that their intention was to enſnare him.

He, however, did not decline anſwering their queſtion, but previouſly deſired to ſee a piece of the tribute money. The piece was accordingly produced, and proved to be coined by the Romans. Upon which our bleſſed Saviour anſwered them, ſince this money bears the image of Cæſar it is his; and, by making uſe of it, you acknowledge his authority. But at the ſame time that you diſcharge your duty to the civil magiſtrate, you ſhould never forget the duty you owe to your God; but remember, that as you bear the image of the great, the omnipotent King, you are his ſubjects, and ought to pay him the tribute of yourſelves, ſerving him to the very utmoſt of your power.

The Phariſees and their followers, under a pretence of religion, often juſtified ſedition; but the Herodians, in order to ingratiate themſelves with the reigning powers, made them a compliment of their conſciences, complying with whatever they enjoined, however oppoſite their commands might be to the divine law. Our Lord, therefore, adapted his anſwer to them both, exhorting them in their regards to God and the magiſtrate, to give each his due; there being no inconſiſtency between their rights, when their rights only are inſiſted on.

So unexpected an anſwer quite diſconcerted, and ſilenced theſe crafty enemies. They were aſtoniſhed

niſhed, both at his having diſcovered their deſign, and his wiſdom in avoiding the ſnare they had ſo artfully laid for him. "When they had heard theſe words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way." *Matt.* xxii. 22.

Though our Lord thus wiſely obviated their crafty deſigns, enemies came againſt him from every quarter. The Sadduces, who denied the doctrine of a future ſtate, together with the exiſtence of angels and ſpirits, firſt returned to the charge; propoſing to him their ſtrongeſt argument againſt their reſurrection, which they deduced from the law given by Moſes, with regard to marriage. "Maſter (ſaid they) Moſes wrote unto us, If any man's brother die, having a wife, and he die without children, that his brother ſhould take his wife, and raiſe up ſeed unto his brother. There were, therefore, ſeven brethren; and the firſt took a wife, and died without children. And the ſecond took her to wife, and died childleſs. And the third took her; and in like manner the ſeven alſo. And they left no children and died. Laſt of all the woman died alſo. Therefore, in the reſurrection, whoſe wife of them is ſhe? for ſeven had her to wife." *Luke* xx. 28, &c.

The Sadduces, who believed the ſoul to be nothing more than a refined matter, were perſuaded, that if there was any future ſtate, it muſt reſemble the preſent; and that being in that ſtate material and mortal, the human race could not be continued, nor the individuals render ed happy, without the pleaſures and conveniencies of marriage. And hence conſidered it as a neceſſary conſequence of the doctrine of the reſurrection, or a future ſtate, that every man's wife ſhould be reſtored to him.

But this argument our bleſſed Saviour ſoon confuted, by telling the Phariſees they were ignorant of the power of God, who had created ſpirit, as well as matter, and who can render man completely happy in the enjoyment of himſelf. He alſo obſerved, that the nature of the life obtained in a future ſtate made marriage altogether ſuperfluous, becauſe in the world to come, men being ſpiritual and immortal, like the angels, there was no need of natural means to propagate or continue the kind. "Ye do err, (ſaid the bleſſed Jeſus) not knowing the the ſcriptures, nor the power of God.

For in the reſurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage." *Matt.* xxii. 29, 30. "Neither can they die any more; for they are equal unto the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the reſurrection." *Luke* xx. 36. Hence we may obſerve, that good men are called the children of the Moſt High, from their inheritance at the reſurrection, and particularly on account of their being adorned with immortality.

Having thus ſhewn their folly and unbelief, he proceeded to ſhew that they were alſo ignorant of the ſcriptures, and particularly of the writings of Moſes, from whence they had drawn their objection, by demonſtrating, from the very law itſelf, the certainty of a reſurrection, at leaſt that of juſt men, and conſequently quite demoliſhed the opinion of the Sadduces, who, by believing the materiality of the ſoul, affirmed that men were annihilated at their death, and that their opinion was founded on the writings of Moſes. "Now (ſaid our Saviour) that the dead are raiſed, even Moſes ſhewed at the buſh, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Iſaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him." *Luke* xx. 37, 38.

As if he had ſaid, The Almighty cannot properly be called God, unleſs he has his people, and be Lord of the living. Since, therefore, Moſes called him the God of Abraham, the God of Iſaac, and the God of Jacob, long after theſe venerable patriarchs were dead, the relation denoted by the word of God ſtill ſubſiſted between them; conſequently they were not annihilated as you pretended, but are ſtill in being, and continue to be the ſervants of the Moſt High.

This argument effectually ſilenced the Sadduces, and agreeably ſurpriſed the people, to ſee the objection hitherto thought impregnable totally aboliſhed, and the ſect they had long abominated fully confuted. "And when the multitude heard this, they were aſtoniſhed at his doctrine." *Matt.* xxii. 33.

Nor could even the Phariſees refrain from giving the Saviour of mankind the praiſe due to his ſuperlative wiſdom; for one of the Scribes deſired him to give his opinion on a queſtion often debated among their teachers; namely, which was the great commandment of the law? The true reaſon for their

their propoſing this queſtion was, to try whether he was as well acquainted with the ſacred law, and the debates that had ariſen on different parts of it, as he was in deriving arguments from the inſpired writers, to deſtroy the tenets of thoſe who denied a future ſtate.

In order to underſtand the queſtion propoſed to our bleſſed Saviour, by the Scribe, it is neceſſary to obſerve, that ſome of the moſt learned Rabbis had declared, that the law of ſacrifices was the great commandment; ſome that it was the law of circumciſion; and others, that the law of meats and waſhings had merited that title.

Our bleſſed Saviour, however, ſhewed that they were all miſtaken; and that the great commandment of the law is the duty of piety; and particularly mentioned that comprehenſive ſummary of it, given by Moſes; "Hear, O Iſrael, the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy ſtrength. This is the firſt commandment." *Mark* xii. 29, 30.

The firſt and chief commandment is, to give God our hearts. The divine Being is ſo tranſcendantly amiable in himſelf, and hath, by the innumerable benefits conferred upon us, ſuch a title to our utmoſt affection, that no obligation bears any proportion to that of loving him. The honour aſſigned to this precept proves, that piety is the nobleſt act of the human mind; and that the chief ingredient in piety is love, founded on a clear and extenſive view of the divine perfections, a permanent ſenſe of his benefits, and a deep conviction of his being the ſovereign good, our portion, and our happineſs. But it is eſſential to love, that there be a delight in contemplating the beauty of the object beloved, whether that beauty be matter of ſenſation or reflection; that we frequently, and with pleaſure, reflect on the benefits conferred on us by the object of our affections; that we have a ſtrong deſire of pleaſing him, great fear of doing any thing to offend him, and a ſenſible joy in thinking we are beloved in return. Hence the duties of devotion, prayer and praiſe, are the moſt natural and genuine exerciſes of the love of God. Nor is this virtue ſo much any ſingle affection, as the continual bent of all the affections and powers of the ſoul: conſequently, to love God is

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as much as poſſible to direct teh whole ſoul towards him, and to exerciſe all its faculties on him as its chief object.

Accordingly, the love of God is deſcribed in ſcripture by the ſeveral operations of the mind, "a following hard after God," namely, by intenſe contemplation; a ſenſe of his perfections, gratitude for his benefits, truſt in his goodneſs, attachment to his ſervice, reſignation to his providence, the obeying his commandments, admiration, hope, fear, joy, &c. not becauſe it conſiſts in any of thoſe ſingly, but in them all together; for to content ourſelves with partial regards to the ſupreme Being is not to be affected towards him in the manner we ought to be, and which his perfections claim.

Hence the words of the precepts are, "Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy ſtrength;" that is, with the joint force of all thy faculties; and, therefore, no idol whatſoever muſt partake of the love and worſhip that is due to him. But the beauty and excellency of this ſtate of mind is beſt ſeen in its effects: for the worſhip and obedience flowing from ſuch an univerſal bent of the ſoul towards God is as much ſuperior to the worſhip and obedience ariſing from partial conſiderations, as the brightneſs of the ſun is to any picture that can be drawn of that luminary.

For example, if we look upon God only as a ſtern lawgiver, who can and will puniſh our rebellion, it may indeed force an awe and dread of him, and as much obedience to his laws as we think will ſatisfy him, but can never produce that conſtancy in our duty, that delight in it, and that earneſtneſs to perform it in its utmoſt extent, which are produced and maintained in the mind, by the ſacred fire of divine love, or by the bent of the whole ſoul turned towards God, as a reconciled father; a frame the moſt excellent that can be conceived, and the moſt to be deſired, becauſe it conſtitutes the higheſt perfection, and real happineſs of the creature.

Again, this commandment requires us to fear God; and certainly we cannot love the Lord our God, unleſs we fear and reverence him: for as the love, ſo the fear of God, is the ſum of all the commandments, and indeed the ſubſtance of all religion. Prayer and praiſe are the tribute and homage of religion; by the

the one we acknowledge our dependance upon God; by the other we confeſs that all our bleſſings and comforts are from him. Such, therefore, as neither pray to God nor praiſe him, cannot be ſaid to have a God; for they acknowledge none, but are gods to themſelves; and as the love and fear of God are often uſed in ſcripture for his whole worſhip and ſervice, ſo is this invocation of his name; "Pour out thy fury upon the heathen, and upon the families that have not called upon thy name;" that is, thoſe who do not worſhip or ſerve him.

But to return.—Our bleſſed Saviour having thus anſwered the queſtion put to him by the Scribe, added, that the ſecond commandment was that which enjoined the love of our neighbour. This had, indeed, no relation to the lawyer's queſtion concerning the firſt commandment; yet our bleſſed Lord thought proper to ſhew him which was the ſecond, probably becauſe the men of his ſect did not acknowledge the importance and precedency of love to theſe neighbours, or becauſe theſe were remarkably deficient in the practiſe of it, as Jeſus himſelf had often found in their attempts to kill him. "And the ſecond is like unto it, Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf."

This principle of love to God will be alſo fruitful of every good work. It will make us really perform the duties of all relations in which we ſtand. And becauſe love worketh no ill to his neighbour, therefore it is the fulfilling of the law; for it will prompt us to a chearful and ready performance of every office, whether of juſtice or charity, that we owe to our neighbour. All the beſt things we can do, if deſtitute of this principle, will appear to be either the effect of hypocriſy, or done to procure the eſteem of men. Without love, a narrowneſs of ſoul will ſhut us up within ourſelves, and make all we do to others only as a ſort of merchandize, trading for our own advantage. It is love only that opens our hearts to conſider other perſons, and to love them on their own account, or rather on account of God, who is love.

Thoſe who poſſeſs ſuch a temper of mind have a conſtant calm within, and are not diſturbed with paſſion, jealouſy, envy, or ill-nature. They obſerve and rejoice in the happineſs of others; they are glad to ſee them eaſy, and ſhare with them in their

joy and felicity; not fretting or complaining, though they enjoy leſs than their neighbours.

It is true, love has a very different effect; for the ſame temper will render many ſo conſiderate of the misfortunes of others, as to ſympathize with them in their diſtreſs, and be greatly affected with ſuch objects of compaſſion as it is not in their power to reſiſt. But there is a real pleaſure even in this compaſſion, as it melts us to the greateſt tenderneſs, and proves us to be men and chriſtians. The good man, by the overflowing of his love, is ſure that he is a favourite with his Maker, becauſe he loves his neighbour. His ſoul dwells at eaſe; there is ſweetneſs in all his thoughts and wiſhes. This makes him clear in his views of every kind, and renders him grateful to all around him.

This charitable temper alſo maintains in him a conſtant diſpoſition for prayer. A charitable man, who has had occaſion to forbear and forgive others, and to return good for evil, dares, with an humble aſſurance, to lay claim to mercy and pardon, through the merits of his bleſſed Redeemer.

But we return to the Scribe, who was aſtoniſhed at the juſtneſs of our Saviour's deciſions, and anſwered, That he had determined rightly, ſince there is but one ſupreme God, whom we muſt all adore: and if we love him above all temporal things, and our neighbour as ourſelves, we worſhip him more acceptably than if we ſacrifice to him "all the cattle upon a thouſand hills."

Our bleſſed Lord highly applauded the piety and wiſdom of this reflection, by declaring that the perſon who made it was not far from the kingdom of God.

As the Phariſees, during the courſe of our Saviour's miniſtry, had propoſed to him many difficult queſtions, with intent to prove his prophetical gifts, he now, in his turn, thought proper to make a trial of their ſkill in the ſacred writings. For this purpoſe, he aſked their opinion of a difficulty concerning the Meſſiah's pedigree. "What think ye of Chriſt? Whoſe ſon is he? They ſay unto him, the ſon of David. *Matt.* xxii. 42. I know, anſwered Jeſus, you ſay Chriſt is the ſon of David; but how can you ſupport your opinion, or render it conſiſtent with the words of David? who himſelf calls him Lord: and "how is he his ſon?" It ſeems the Jewiſh doctors did not imagine that their

their Meſſiah would be endued with any perfections greater than thoſe that might be enjoyed by human nature: for though they called him the ſon of God, they had no notion that he came from God, and therefore could not pretend to ſolve the difficulty.

The latter queſtion, however, might have convinced them of their error; for if the Meſſiah was only to be a ſecular prince, as they ſuppoſed, and to rule over the men of his own time, he never could have been called, Lord, by perſons who died before he was born; far leſs would ſo mighty a prince as David, who was alſo his progenitor, have conferred on him that title. Since, therefore, his kingdom ſhall comprehend the men of all countries and times, paſt, preſent, and to come; the doctors, if they had thought accurately upon the ſubject, ſhould have expected in their Meſſiah a king different from all other kings. Beſides, he is to ſit at God's right hand, "till all his enemies are made his footſtool."

Such pertinent replies, and ſolid reaſoning, gave the people an high opinion of his wiſdom; and ſhewed them, how far ſuperior he was to their moſt renowned Rabbi, whoſe arguments, to prove their opinions and anſwers to the objections which were raiſed againſt him, were, in general, very weak and trifling.—Nay, his foes themſelves, from the repeated proofs they had received from the prodigious depth of his underſtanding, were impreſſed with ſuch an opinion of his wiſdom, that they judged it impoſſible to entangle him in his talk. Accordingly, they left off attempting it, and from that day forth troubled him no more with their inſidious queſtions.

But having mentioned the final conqueſt and deſtruction of his enemies, who were to be made his footſtool, agreeable to the prediction of the royal pſalmiſt, he turned towards his diſciples; and, in the hearing of the multitude, ſolemnly cautioned them to beware of the Scribes and Phariſees; inſinuating thereby who the enemies were whoſe deſtruction he had mentioned. "The Scribes and the Phariſees, (ſaid he) ſit in Moſes ſeat. All therefore whatſoever they bid you obſerve, that obſerve and do; but do not ye after their works: for they ſay, and do not." *Matt.* xxiii. 2, 3.

While they teach the doctrines before delivered by Moſes, obſerve all they ſay; but by no means imi-

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tate their practices; for they impose many precepts on their disciples, which they never perform themselves. "For they bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them on mens shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men." *Matt.* xxiii. 4, 5.

The difficult precepts they impose on others are never regarded by these hypocrites, and any good action they may happen to perform is vitiated by the principle from whence it proceeds. They do it only with a view to popular applause, and not from a regard to God, far less from a love of goodness. They are proud and arrogant to access, as is plain from their affected gravity in their cloaths; from the anxiety they discover lest they should not obtain the principal seats in the public assemblies, and from their affecting to be saluted in the streets with the sounding titles of Rabbi, and father. "They make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments. And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi." *Matt.* xxiii. 5, 6, 7.

The word *Rabbi* signifies, properly, *great*, and was given to those men who had rendered themselves remarkable for the extent of their learning; it is therefore no wonder that the proud and supercilious Pharisees were fond of a title, which so highly complimented their understandings, and gave them great authority with their disciples.

But the followers of the blessed Jesus were to decline this title; because the thing signified by it belonged solely to their master, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and because they owed no part of their knowledge to themselves, but derived it entirely from him who came down from heaven. "But be not ye called Rabbi; for one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth; for one is your Father which is in heaven." *Matt.* xxiii. 8, 9. Life with all its blessings, come from God, and men wholly depend upon him; all praise and thankfulness, therefore, should ultimately be referred to him: so that if any one teacheth rightly, not the teacher, but the wisdom of the Almighty, is to be praised, which exerts and communicates itself by him.

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Nor were the disciples of our blessed Saviour to accept of the title of *master* or *leader*, which the Jewish doctors also courted, because in point of commission and inspiration, they were all equal, neither had they any title to rule the consciences of men, except by virtue of the inspiration which they had received from their master, to whom alone the prerogative of infallibility belonged. "Neither be ye called masters; for one is your master, even Christ." *Matt.* xxiii. 10.

The divine teacher, however, did not intend by this to insinuate, that it was sinful to call men by their stations they held in the world: he only intended to reprove the simplicity of the common people who loaded their teachers with praises, and forgot to ascribe any thing to God; and to root out of the minds of his apostles the Pharisaical vanity, which decked itself with honour belonging solely to the Creator of the universe. Accordingly, that he might instil into their hearts humility to dispose them to do good offices to one another, as occasion offered, he assured them it was the only road to true greatness; for by assuming what did not properly belong to them, they should be despised both by God and men. Whereas those who did not disdain to perform the meanest offices of love to their brethren, should enjoy a high degree of the divine favour.

The above discourses greatly incensed the Scribes and Pharisees, as they were pronounced in the hearing of many of that order; it is therefore no wonder, that they watched every opportunity to destroy him. But this was not a time to put their bloody designs in execution; the people set too high a value on his doctrine, to suffer any violence to be offered to his person; and as this was the last sermon he was ever to preach in public, it was necessary, that he should use some severity, as all his mild persuasions proved ineffectual.

He therefore denounced, in the most solemn manner, dreadful woes against them, not on account of the personal injuries he had received from them, but on account of their excessive wickedness.

They were public teachers of religion; and therefore should have used every method in their power to recommend its precepts to the people, and to have been themselves shining examples of every duty he enjoined; but, on the contrary,

they abuſed every mark and character of goodneſs for all the purpoſes of villainy, and under the cloak of a ſevere and ſanctified aſpect, they were malicious, implacable, lewd, covetous, and rapacious. In a word, inſtead of being reformers, they were the corrupters of mankind, and conſequently their wickedneſs deſerved the greateſt reproof that could be given by the great Redeemer of mankind. "Wo unto you, Scribes and Phariſees, hypocrites; for ye ſhut up the kingdom of heaven againſt men; for ye neither go in yourſelves, neither ſuffer them that were entering to go in. Wo unto you, Scribes and Phariſees, hypocrites; for ye devour widows' houſes, and for a pretence make long prayer; therefore ye ſhall receive the greater damnation. Wo unto you, Scribes and Phariſees, hypocrites; for ye compaſs ſea and land to make one proſelyte, and when he is made, ye make him two-fold more the child of hell than yourſelves." *Matt.* xxiii. 15, &c.

The puniſhment you ſhall ſuffer will be terribly ſevere, becauſe you have given a wrong interpretation of the ancient prophecies concerning the Meſſiah, and done all that is in your power to hinder the people from repenting of their ſins, and believing the goſpel: becauſe you have committed the groſſeſt iniquities, and under the cloak of religion have devoured the ſubſtance of widows and orphans, hoping to hide your villanies by long prayers: becauſe ye have expreſſed the greateſt zeal imaginable in making proſelytes, not with a view to render the Gentiles more wiſe and virtuous, but to acquire their riches, and a command over their conſciences; and inſtead of teaching them the precepts of virtue and the moral duties of religion, you confine their duties to ſuperſtitious and ceremonial inſtitutions; and hence they often relapſe into their old ſtate of Heatheniſm, and become more wicked than before your converſion, and conſequently liable to a more ſevere ſentence.

He alſo expoſed their doctrine concerning oaths: and declared in oppoſition to their abominable tenets, that every oath, if the matter of it be lawful, is obligatory: becauſe when men ſwear by any part of the creation, it is an appeal to the Creator himſelf; for in any other light an oath of this kind is abſolute ridiculous, the object having

ing neither knowledge of the fact, nor power to puniſh the perjury. "Wo unto you ye blind guides, which ſay, Whoſoever ſhall ſwear by the temple, it is nothing: but whoſoever ſhall ſwear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor. Ye fools, and blind: for whether is greater, the gold or the temple that ſanctifieth the gold? and whoſoever ſhall ſwear by the altar it is nothing, but whoſoever ſweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty, Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that ſanctifieth the gift? Whoſo therefore ſhall ſwear by the altar, ſweareth by it, and by all things thereon. And whoſo ſhall ſwear by the temple, ſweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that ſhall ſwear by heaven, ſweareth by the throne of God, and by him that ſitteth thereon." *Matt.* xxiii. 16, &c.

He likewiſe reprehended their ſuperſtitious practices, in obſerving the minuteſt parts of the ceremonial precepts of the law, and at the ſame time utterly neglecting the eternal and indiſpenſable rules of righteouſneſs. "Wo unto you, Scribes and Phariſees, hypocrites; for ye pay tythe of mint, and aniſe, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith; theſe ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." *Matt.* xxiii. 23.

Their hypocriſy did not eſcape the cenſure of the Son of God; they ſpared no pains to appear virtuous in the eyes of the world, and maintain all external conduct that ſhould acquire the praiſes of men, but at the ſame time neglected to adorn their ſouls with the robe of righteouſneſs, which is the only ornament that can render them dear in the ſight of their Maker. "Wo unto you, Scribes and Phariſees, hypocrites; for ye make clean the outſide of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and exceſs. Thou blind Phariſee, cleanſe firſt that which is within the cup and the platter, that the outſide of them may be clean alſo." *Matt.* xxiii. 25, 26. Cleanſe firſt the mind, thy inward man, from evil diſpoſitions and affections, and the outward behaviour will of courſe be virtuous and praiſe-worthy.

Moreover he animadverted upon the ſucceſs of their hypocriſy.—They deceived the ſimple and unthinking part of mankind with their pretended ſanctity, appearing like whited

whited ſepulchres, beautiful on the outſide, while their internal parts were full of uncleanneſs. "Wo unto you, Scribes and Phariſees, hypocrites; for ye are like unto whited ſepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanneſs. Even ſo ye alſo outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocriſy and iniquity." *Mat.* xxiii. 27, 28.

He alſo reproved the pains they had taken in adorning the ſepulchres of the prophets; becauſe they pretended a great veneration for their memory, and even condemned their fathers, who killed them, ſaying, that if they had lived in the days of their fathers, they would have oppoſed ſuch monſtrous wickedneſs, while at the ſame time, all their actions abundantly proved that they ſtill cheriſhed the ſame ſpirit they condemned in their father, perſecuting the meſſengers of the Moſt High, particularly his only begotten Son, whom they were determined to deſtroy. "Wo unto you, Scribes and Phariſees, hypocrites; becauſe ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garniſh the ſepulchres of the righteous, and ſay, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witneſſes unto yourſelves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets." *Matt.* xxiii. 29,

He added, that the divine Being was deſirous of trying every method for their converſion, though all theſe inſtances of mercy were ſlighted, and there they muſt expect ſuch terrible vengeance, as ſhould be a ſtanding monument of the divine diſpleaſure againſt all the murders committed by the ſons of men, from the foundation of the world.

Having thus laid before them their heinous guilt and dreadful puniſhment, he was at the thought of the calamities which were ſoon to fall upon them, exceedingly moved, and his breaſt filled with ſenſations of pity, to ſuch a degree, that unable to contain himſelf, he brake forth into tears, bewailing the hard lot of the city of Jeruſalem; for as its inhabitants had more deeply imbrued their hands in the blood of the prophets, they were to drink more deeply of the puniſhment due to ſuch crimes. "O Jeruſalem, Jeruſalem,

Jeruſalem, thou that killeſt the prophets and ſtoneſt them which are ſent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your houſe is left unto you deſolate." *Matt.* xxiii. 37, &c.

This benevolent, as well as pathetic exclamation of our bleſſed Lord cannot fail to excite in the pious mind the warmeſt emotions of love, to the gracious Saviour of mankind, as well as pity for that once choſen, but ſince degenerate race. How often had the Almighty called upon them to return from their evil way, before he ſent his only begotten Son into the world? How often, how emphatically did the compaſſionate Jeſus entreat them to embrace the merciful terms now offered them by the Almighty; and with what unconquerable obſtinacy did they refuſe the benevolent offers, and reſiſt the moſt winning expreſſions of the divine love! By the word *houſe*, our bleſſed Saviour meant the temple, which was from that time to be left unto them deſolate; the glory of the Lord, which Haggi had propheſied ſhould fill the ſecond houſe, was now departing from it. Adding, "I ſay unto you, Ye ſhall not ſee me henceforth, till ye ſhall ſay, Bleſſed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." *Matt.* xxiii. 39. As if he had ſaid, as ye have killed the prophets, and ſtoned me, whom the Father hath ſent from the courts of heaven, and will ſhortly put me, who am the Lord of the temple, to death, your holy houſe ſhall be left deſolate, and your nation totally deſerted by me; nor ſhall you ſee me any more till ye ſhall acknowledge the dignity of my character, and the importance of my miſſion, and ſay with the whole earth, "Bleſſed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

Thus did the bleſſed Jeſus ſtrip the ſcribes and Phariſees of their hyprocritical maſk. He treated them with ſeverity becauſe their crimes were of the blackeſt dye: and hence we ſhould learn to be really good, and not flatter ourſelves that we can cover our crimes with the cloak of hypocriſy, from that piercing eye, from which nothing is concealed.

The people could not fail being aſtoniſhed at theſe diſcourſes, as they had always conſidered their teachers as the moſt righteous amongſt the

ſons of men. Nay, the perſons themſelves, againſt whom they were levelled, were confounded, becauſe their own conſcience convinced them of the truth of every particular laid to their charge. They therefore, knew not what courſe to purſue; and in the midſt of their heſitation, they let Jeſus depart without making any attempt to ſeize him, or inflict on him any kind of puniſhment.

CHAP. XXXI.

Our Saviour commends even the ſmalleſt Act, becauſe it proceeded from a truly benevolent Motive. Predicts the Demolition of the magnificent Temple at Jeruſalem, and delivers ſeveral inſtructive Parables.

JESUS, the infallible preacher of righteouſneſs, having thus expoſed the ſecret practices of the Scribes and Phariſees, repaired with his diſciples into the court of the women, called the treaſury, from ſeveral cheſts being fixed to the pillars of the portico ſurrounding the court, for receiving the offerings of thoſe who came to worſhip in the temple. While he continued in this court, "he beheld how the people caſt money into the treaſury: and many that were rich caſt in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and ſhe threw in two mites, which made a farthing.—And he called unto him his diſciples, and ſaith unto them, Verily, I ſay unto you, that this poor widow hath caſt more in, than all they which have caſt into the treaſury. For all they did caſt in of their abundance, but ſhe of her want did caſt in all that ſhe had, even all her living." *Mark* xii. 41, &c.

Though the offering given by this poor widow was in itſelf very ſmall, yet, in proportion to the goods of fortune ſhe enjoyed, it was remarkably large; for it was all ſhe had, even all her living. In order, therefore, to encourage charity, and to ſhew that it is the diſpoſition of the mind, not the magnificence of the offering, that attached the regard of the Almighty, the Son of God applauded this poor widow, as having given more in proportion, than any of the rich.—Their offerings though great in reſpect of hers, were but a ſmall part of their eſtates, whereas her offering was her whole ſtock. And from this paſſage of the goſpel we ſhould learn, that the poor, who in appearance are denied the means of doing charitable offices, are encouraged to do all they can. For how ſmall ſoever the gift may be, the

the Almighty, who beholds the heart, values it, not according to what it is in itſelf, but according to the diſpoſition with which it is given.

On the other hand, we ſhould learn from hence, that it is not enough for the rich, that they exceed the poor in the gifts of charity; they ſhould beſtow in proportion to their fortune; and they would do well to remember, that a little given, where a little only is left, appears a much nobler offering, in the ſight of the Almighty, and diſcovers a more benevolent and humane temper of mind, than ſums much larger beſtowed out of plentiful abundance.

The diſciples now remembered that their Maſter, at the concluſion of his pathetic lamentation over Jeruſalem, had declared that the temple ſhould not any more be favoured with his preſence, till they ſhould ſay, "Bleſſed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

A reſolution of this kind could not fail of greatly ſurprizing his diſciples; and therefore, as he was departing from that ſacred ſtructure, they deſired him to obſerve the beauty of the building; inſinuating, that they thought it ſtrange he ſhould intimate an intention of leaving it deſolate; that ſo glorious a fabric, celebrated in every corner of the earth, was not to be deſerted raſhly: and that they ſhould think themſelves ſupremely happy, when he, as the Meſſiah and deſcendant of David, ſhould take poſſeſſion of it, and erect his throne in the midſt of Jeruſalem. And as they went out of the temple, one of his diſciples ſaith unto him, "Maſter, ſee what manner of ſtones, and what buildings are here."

The eaſtern wall of the temple, which fronted the mount of Olives, whither the diſciples, with their maſter, were then retiring, was built from the bottom of the valley to a prodigious height, with ſtones of an incredible bulk, firmly compacted together, and therefore made a very grand appearance, at a diſtance. The eaſtern wall is ſuppoſed to have been the only remains of Solomon's temple, and had eſcaped when the Chaldeans burnt it. But this building, however coſtly or ſtrong it appeared, our Saviour told them, ſhould be totally deſtroyed, "Seeſt thou (ſaid he) theſe great buildings? there ſhall not be left one ſtone upon another that ſhall not be thrown down." *Mark* xiii. 2.

That

That noble edifice, raiſed with much labour, and at vaſt expence, ſhall be raſed to the very foundation. The diſciples, therefore, when they heard their maſter affirm, that not ſo much as one of theſe enormous ſtones, which had mocked the fury of Nebuchadnezzar's army, and ſurvived the deſtructive hand of time, was to be left one upon another, they perceived that the whole temple was to be demoliſhed, but did not ſuſpect that the ſacrifices were to be taken away, and a new religion introduced, which rendered the temple unneceſſary. They, therefore, flattered themſelves, that the fabric then ſtanding, however glorious it might appear, was too ſmall for the numerous worſhippers who would frequent it, when all the nations of the world were ſubject to the Meſſiah's kingdom, and was therefore to be pulled down, in order to be erected on a more magnificent plan, ſuitable to the idea they had conceived of his future empire. Filled with theſe pleaſing imaginations, they received the news with pleaſure, meditating, as they walked to the mountain, on the glorious things which were ſhortly to come to paſs.

When they arrived on the mount of Olives, and their Maſter had taken his ſeat on ſome eminence, from whence they had a proſpect of the temple and part of the city, his diſciples drew near, to know when the demolition of the old ſtructure was to happen, and what were to be the ſigns of his coming, and of the end of the world. "And as he ſat upon the mount of Olives the diſciples came unto him privately, ſaying, Tell us, when ſhall theſe things be? and what ſhall be the ſign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" *Matt.* xxiv. 3.

The diſciples, by this requeſt, ſeem deſirous of knowing what ſigns ſhould precede the erection of that extenſive empire, over which they ſuppoſed the Meſſiah was to reign: for they ſtill expected he would govern a ſecular kingdom. They therefore connected the demolition of the temple with their maſter's coming, though they had not the leaſt notion that he was to deſtroy the nations and change the form of religious worſhip.

They, therefore, meant by the "end of the world (or, as the words ſhould have been tranſlated) the end of the ages," the period of the political government then executed by heathen

heathen procurators; and conſidered their maſter's coming to deſtroy the conſtitution then ſubſiſting, as a very deſirable event. They alſo thought the demolition of the temple proper, as they expected a large and more ſuperb building, proportioned to the number of the Meſſiah's ſubjects, would be erected in its ſtead.

That this is the real ſenſe of the diſciples queſtion, will ſufficiently appear, if we conſider that the diſciples were delighted with the proſpect; whereas, if they had meant by the end of the world, the final period of all things, the deſtruction of the temple would have exhibited to them, in their preſent temper of mind, a melancholy proſpect, which they could not have beheld, without a deep concern.

Our bleſſed Saviour, therefore, was careful to convince them of their miſtake, by telling them that he was not come to rule a ſecular empire, as they ſuppoſed, but to puniſh the Jews for their perfidy and rebellion, by deſtroying both their temple and nation. "Take heed (ſaid he) that no man deceive you. For many ſhall come in my name, ſaying, I am Chriſt; and ſhall deceive many."

This caution was far from being unneceſſary, becauſe, though the diſciples were to ſee their maſter aſcend into heaven, they might take occaſion from the prophecy, to think that he would appear again on earth, and therefore be in danger of ſeduction by the falſe Chriſts that ſhould ariſe. "And when ye ſhall hear of wars and rumours of wars, ſee that ye be not troubled, for all theſe things muſt come to paſs; but the end is not yet." Before this nation and temple are deſtroyed, terrible wars will happen in the land: "For nation ſhall riſe againſt nation, and kingdom, againſt kingdom: and there ſhall be famines, and peſtilences, and earthquakes, in divers places." *Matt.* xxiv. 7.

Theſe are the preludes of the important event, forerunners of the evils which ſhall befal this nation and people. At the ſame time you ſhall meet with hot perſecutions; walk, therefore, circumſpectly, and arm yourſelves both with patience and fortitude, that ye may be able to perform your duty, through the whole courſe of theſe perſecutions; for you ſhall be brought before the great men of the earth, for my ſake. "But when they ſhall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought

before hand what ye ſhall ſpeak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatſoever ſhall be given you in that hour, that ſpeak ye: for it is not ye that ſpeak, but the Holy Ghoſt." *Mark* xiii. 11.

During this time of trouble and confuſion, he told them, the perfidy of mankind ſhould be ſo great towards one another, that, "brother ſhall betray the brother to death, and the father the ſon: and children ſhall riſe up againſt their parents, and ſhall cauſe them to be put to death." The unbelieving Jews, and apoſtate Chriſtians, ſhall commit the moſt enormous and inhuman crimes. It is, therefore, no wonder that the perfidy and wickedneſs of ſuch pretended chriſtians, ſhall diſcourage many diſciples, and greatly hinder the propagation of the goſpel. But he who ſupports his faith, during theſe perſecutions, and is not led aſtray by the ſeduction of falſe chriſtians, ſhall eſcape that terrible deſtruction, which, like a deluge, will overflow the land.

And when Jeruſalem ſhall be ſurrounded with armies, Pagan armies, bearing in their ſtandards the images of their gods, the "abomination of deſolation," mentioned by the prophet Daniel: then let him who readeth the predictions of that prophet underſtand, that the end of the city and ſanctuary, together with the ceaſing of the ſacrifice and oblation there predicted, is come, and conſequently the final period of the Jewiſh polity.

"Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midſt of it depart out." *Luke* xxi. 21. "Let him which is on the houſe top not come down to take any thing out of his houſe. Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his cloaths." *Matt.* xxiv. 17, 18. Then ſhall be fulfilled the awful predictions of the prophet Daniel, and the dreadful judgments denounced againſt the impenitent and unbelieving.

In thoſe days of vengeance, the women who are with child, and thoſe who have infants hanging at their breaſts, ſhall be particularly unhappy, becauſe they cannot flee from the impending deſtruction.—"But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter," when the badneſs of the roads, and the rigour of of the ſeaſon, will render ſpeedy travelling very troubleſome, if not impoſſible; "neither on the

the ſabbath day," when you ſhall think it unlawful. "For then ſhall be great tribulation, ſuch as was not ſince the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever ſhall be." This is confirmed by what Joſephus tells us, that no leſs than eleven hundred thouſand periſhed in the ſiege.

The heavenly prophet added, that except the days of tribulation ſhould be ſhortened, none of the inhabitants of Jeruſalem and Judea, of whom he is ſpeaking, ſhould eſcape deſtruction: in confirmation of which Joſephus tells us, that the quarrels which raged during the ſiege, were ſo fierce and obſtinate, that both within the walls of Jeruſalem, and without in the neighbouring country, the whole land was one continued ſcene of horror and deſolation, and had the ſiege continued much longer, the whole nation of the Jews had been totally deſtroyed, according to our Lord's prediction.—"But (added our bleſſed Saviour) for the elect's ſake, whom he hath choſen, he hath ſhortened the days." By the elect are meant, ſuch of the Jews as had embraced the doctrines of the goſpel, and particularly thoſe who were brought in with the fulneſs of the Gentiles.

As it is natural, in time of trouble, to look with eager expectation for a deliverer, our bleſſed Saviour cautioned his diſciples not to liſten to any pretences of that kind, as many falſe chriſts would ariſe, and deceive great numbers of the people. A prediction that was fully accompliſhed, during the terrible ſiege of Jeruſalem by the Romans; ſo Joſephus tells us, that many aroſe pretending to be the Meſſiah, boaſting that they would deliver the nation from all its enemies. And the multitude, always too prone to liſten to deceivers, who promiſe temporal advantages, giving credit to thoſe deceivers, became more obſtinate in their oppoſition to the Romans, and thereby rendered their deſtruction more ſevere and inevitable.

And what ſtill increaſed the infatuation of the people, was their performing wonderful things, during the war; and accordingly Joſephus calls them magicians and ſorcerers. Hence we ſee the propriety of the caution given by the Son of God, who foretold that "they ſhould ſhew great ſigns and wonders, inſomuch that if it were poſſible, they would deceive the very elect.

But

But take heed: behold, I have foretold you all things."

And as the partizans of the falſe chriſts might pretend that the Meſſiah was concealed awhile, for fear of the Romans: and the weaker ſort of Chriſtians, without this warning, imagined that Chriſt was actually returned to deliver the nation in its extremity, and to puniſh their enemies, who now ſo cruelly oppreſſed them, and that he would ſhew himſelf as ſoon as it was proper, the bleſſed Jeſus thought right to caution them againſt this particular; "Wherefore, if they ſhall ſay unto you, Behold, he is in the deſert, go not forth: behold, he is in the ſecret chambers, believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the eaſt, and ſhineth even unto the weſt; ſo ſhall alſo the coming of the Son of man be." *Matt.* xxiv. 26, &c.

The coming of the ſon of man ſhall be like lightning, ſwift and deſtructive. But he will not come perſonally, his ſervants only ſhall come, the Roman armies, who, by his command, ſhall deſtroy this nation, as eagles devour their prey.

Having thus given them a particular account of the various circumſtances which ſhould precede the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, he next deſcribed that cataſtrophe itſelf, in all the pomp of language and imagery made uſe of by the ancient prophets, when they foretold the deſtruction of cities and kingdoms. "But in thoſe days, after that tribulation, the ſun ſhall be darkened, and the moon ſhall not give her light: and the ſtars of heaven ſhall fall, and the powers that are in heaven ſhall be ſhaken." *Mark* xiii. 24, &c. "And upon the earth diſtreſs of nations, with perplexity, the ſea and the waves roaring: mens hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after thoſe things which are coming on the earth." *Luke* xxi. 25, &c.

By theſe lofty and figurative expreſſions, the decaying of all the glory, excellency and proſperity of the nation, and the introduction of univerſal ſadneſs, miſery and confuſion, are beautifully deſcribed. The roaring of the ſea and the waves may juſtly be conſidered as metaphorical, as the ſigns in the ſun, in the moon, and in the ſtars are plainly ſo, and by the powers of heaven are meant the whole Jewiſh polity, government, laws and religion, which were the work of heaven: theſe, our Lord tells us, ſhould be

be ſhaken, or rather utterly diſſolved.

As the diſciples had, in conformity to the repeated queſtions of the Phariſees, during his miniſtry, aſked what ſhould be the ſign of his coming; our bleſſed Saviour told them that after the tribulation of thoſe days, when the ſun ſhould be darkened, and all the enemies of the Meſſiah ſhould mourn, they ſhould ſee the accompliſhment of what Daniel foretold, by the figurative expreſſion of the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven: for they ſhould behold the ſignal puniſhment executed on the Jewiſh nation by the Roman armies ſent for that purpoſe, and by the decree and permiſſion of heaven. "Then ſhall appear the ſign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then ſhall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they ſhall ſee the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory." *Matt.* xxiv. 30.

Then were the followers of Chriſt to be delivered from the oppreſſion under which they had long groaned, and openly honoured, before the whole earth; and on this may true believers reſt; becauſe it is founded on eternal truth. "Verily, I ſay unto you, This generation ſhall not paſs, till all theſe things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth ſhall paſs away, but my words ſhall not paſs away." *Matt.* xxiv. 34, 35.

Whoever ſhall compare the prediction of our Saviour with the hiſtory Joſephus wrote of the war, cannot fail of being ſtruck with the wiſdom of Chriſt, and acknowledging that his prediction was truly divine; for as the Jewiſh nation was at this time in the moſt flouriſhing ſtate, the event here foretold was altogether improbable. Beſides, the circumſtances of the deſtruction are very numerous and ſurprizingly great: and the whole delivered without any ambiguity. It is therefore a prophecy of ſuch a kind, as could never have been uttered by any impoſtor, and conſequently the perſon who delivered it was acquainted with the ſecret councils of heaven, and was truly divine.

Many cavillers againſt the Chriſtian ſcheme have aſked, why Chriſt ſhould order his diſciples not to flee from Jeruſalem, till they ſaw it encompaſſed with the Roman army, when it would then be impoſſible for them to make their eſcape? But perſons, before they propoſe ſuch queſtions, would do well to read attentively the hiſtory Joſephus has

given us of theſe terrible calamities; becauſe they would there find a ſolution to the difficulty. That hiſtorian tells us, That Ceſtius Gallus ſurrounded the city with his army, and, at a time when he could eaſily have taken the city, ſuddenly withdrew his forces without any apparent reaſon. He adds, that as ſoon as the ſiege was raiſed, many eminent Jews fled from it, as from a ſinking ſhip. In all probability many of theſe were Chriſtians, who being warned by this prophecy of their great Maſter, ſaved themſelves by flight, as he had directed.—Thus we ſee what frivolous objections are made by the free-thinkers of our age againſt the truth of the ſacred writings, and how eaſily they are anſwered.

Having thus beautifully, but awfully deſcribed this important and ſtriking event, the bleſſed Jeſus aſſured his diſciples, that it would be very unexpected, and thence urged the neceſſity of a watchful vigilance, leſt they ſhould be ſurpriſed, and have a ſhare in thoſe calamities.—"But as the days of Noe were, ſo ſhall alſo the coming of the Son of Man be." *Matt.* xxiv. 37. "Watch ye, therefore, (for ye know not when the maſter of the houſe cometh: at even, or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning) leſt, coming ſuddenly, he find you ſleeping." *Mark* xiii. 35, 36.

It was natural, as men were to undergo, at the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, nearly the ſame miſeries, and as the paſſions which its approach would raiſe in their minds were ſimilar to thoſe which will happen at the deſtruction of the world and the general judgment; it was natural, I ſay, for our bleſſed Saviour, on this occaſion, to put his diſciples in mind of that judgment, and to exhort them to the faithful diſcharge of their duty, from the conſideration of the ſuddenneſs of his coming to call every individual to account after death: "therefore, be ye all ready; for in ſuch an hour, as you think not, the Son of Man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wiſe ſervant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his houſhold, to give them meat in due ſeaſon? Bleſſed is that ſervant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, ſhall find ſo doing. Verily, I ſay unto you, That he ſhall make him ruler over all his goods." *Matt.* xxiv. 44, &c. As if he had ſaid, you, who are the miniſters of religion, ought to be particularly attentive in diſcharging the important

tant truſt committed to your care; you are the ſtewards in whom are entruſted the whole houſhold of the church; and you would do well to remember, that your example will have a great effect upon the minds of thoſe employed under you. It is your duty to be well acquainted with the ſtores of the evangelical truths, and to underſtand how they may be applied to the beſt advantage; you ſhould be alſo careful to know the characters of the different perſons under your directions, that you may be able to give every one of them his portion of meat in due ſeaſon; and if I find you thus employed at my coming, I will reward you with the joys of my kingdom, even as an earthly maſter beſtows particular marks of reſpect on ſuch ſervants as have been remarkably faithful in any important truſt.

But, on the other hand, if you are not true to the truſt repoſed in you; if you pervert your office, and watch not over the ſouls committed to your care, I will come unto you, unexpectedly, and make you dreadful examples of mine anger, by the ſevere puniſhments which I will inflict upon you. "But if that evil ſervant ſhall ſay in his heart, my Lord delayeth his coming, and ſhall begin to ſmite his fellow-ſervants, and to eat and drink with the drunken: the lord of that ſervant ſhall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of: and ſhall cut him aſunder, and appoint him his portion, with the hypocrites: there ſhall be weeping, and gnaſhing of teeth," *Matt.* xxiv. 48, &c.

Having thus generally preſcribed the future ſtate of retribution, our Lord paſſed to the conſideration of the general judgment, when thoſe rewards and puniſhments ſhould be diſtributed in their utmoſt extent. This could not fail of animating his diſciples to a vigorous diſcharge of their duty; and by the ſtriking repreſentation of the laſt judgment he has here given, muſt greatly tend to rouſe the conſciences of men from their lethargy, and conſider, before it be too late, "the things which belong to their peace."

Then ſhall the kingdom of heaven, the goſpel-kingdom, in the laſt diſpenſation of it, when the kingdom of grace is going to be ſwallowed up in the kingdom of glory, be likened unto ten virgins who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wiſe, and five of them

them were fooliſh. They that were fooliſh took, indeed, their lamps, but put no oil in their veſſels, while the wiſe, as an inſtance of their prudence and foreſight, took both their lamps, and oil in their veſſels, knowing that it was uncertain when the bridegroom would arrive, and that they might, in all probability, wait long for his coming. Nor were they miſtaken: for the bridegroom did not come ſo ſoon as they expected. And while he tarried they all ſlumbered and ſlept, and at midnight there was a great cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him; upon which all thoſe virgins aroſe and trimmed their lamps, and the fooliſh ſaid unto the wiſe, give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out. But the wiſe anſwered, ſaying, not ſo, leſt there be not enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that ſell, and buy for yourſelves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was ſhut. Afterwards, alſo, came the other virgins, ſaying, Lord, Lord, open unto us. But he from within anſwered, and ſaid unto them, Verily, I ſay unto you, I know you not. "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day, nor the hour, wherein the Son of Man cometh. *Matt.* xxv. 13.

In order to underſtand this parable, we muſt remember, that it alludes to eaſtern people. It was uſual with them for the bridegroom to bring his bride home in the evening, ſooner or later, as circumſtances might happen; and that they might be received properly at his houſe, his female acquaintance, eſpecially thoſe of the younger ſort, were invited to come and wait with lamps, till ſome of his retinue, diſpatched before the reſt, informed them that he was near at hand; upon which they trimmed their lamps; went forth to welcome him, and conduct him with his bride into the houſe; for which they were honoured as gueſts, at the marriage feaſts, and ſhared in the uſual feſtivities.

To ten ſuch virgins our bleſſed Saviour compares all thoſe to whom the goſpel is preached, becauſe this was the general number appointed to wait on the bridegroom; and to theſe all chriſtian profeſſors may be likened, who, taking their lamp of chriſtian profeſſion, go forth to meet the bridegroom; that is, prepare themſelves as candidates for the kingdom of heaven, and deſire to

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be admitted with Chriſt, the celeſtial bridegroom, into the happy manſions of immortality.

We muſt remember, that there always was, and always will be, a mixture of good and bad in the church, till the great day of ſeparation arrives. The weakneſs of the fooliſh is repreſented by their taking no oil in their veſſels, with their lamps; that is, the the fooliſh chriſtians content themſelves with the bare lamp of a profeſſion, and never think of furniſhing it with the oil of divine grace, the fruit of which is a life of holineſs. Whereas the wiſe, well knowing that a lamp, without the ſupply of oil, would be ſpeedily extinguiſhed; that faith, without love and holineſs, will be of no conſequence, take care to ſupply themſelves with a ſufficient quantity of the divine grace, and to diſplay in their lives the works of love and charity. While all thoſe virgins, though differently ſupplied, waiting the coming of the bridegroom, all ſlumbered and ſlept; that is, all chriſtians, both good and bad, the ſincere and the hypocrite, all lie down together in the ſleep of death; and while the bridegroom delays his coming, ſlumber in the chambers of the duſt.

The Jews have a tradition, that Chriſt's coming to judgment will be at midnight, which agrees with that particular in the parable, "at midnight there was a cry made, go ye out to meet him." But however this be, whether he will come at midnight, or in the morning, it will be awfully ſudden and alarming. The great cry will be heard to the end of the earth! the trumpet ſhall ſound, and the mighty archangel's voice pierce even the bowels of the earth, and the depths of the ocean. "Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him."

The graves, both earthly and watry, muſt ſurrender their clayey tenants, and all will then begin to think how they may prepare themſelves to find admittance to the marriage-ſupper of the lamb. "Then all thoſe virgins aroſe, and trimmed their lamps." But the fooliſh ſoon perceived their folly: their lamps were gone out, totally extinguiſhed, and they had no oil to ſupport the flame; in like manner the hypocrite's hope ſhall periſh. But the wiſe were in a much happier condition; they had oil in their veſſels ſufficient for themſelves, but none to ſpare; for, when the fooliſh virgins

gins would have procured ſome from them, they denied their requeſt, fearing there would not be enough for both.

They are here beautifully repreſented nominal, and ſincere chriſtians. The former having only the bare lamp of a profeſſion, and who have not been ſolicitous to gain the oil of divine grace, by a conſtant uſe of the means aſſigned, will fare like the fooliſh virgins. While the latter, whoſe hearts are ſtocked with divine oil, will, like the wiſe virgins, enter into the joy of their Lord.

But the fooliſh, going to purchaſe oil, miſſed the bridegroom, and behold "the door was ſhut." They at laſt, however, reached the gate, and with great importunity cried, "Lord, Lord, open unto us." But he anſwered, and ſaid, "Verily, I ſay unto you, I know you not." As you denied me on earth, I deny you now; depart from me, I know you not! How juſtly therefore did our bleſſed Saviour bid us all watch, that we may be found ready whenever he cometh; or commands, by the king of terrors, our attendance before his judgment-ſeat. Let us not refuſe this kind invitation of being conſtantly prepared to meet the heavenly bridegroom: let us fill our lamps with oil, that we may be ready to follow our great Maſter into the happy manſions of the heavenly Canaan.

But, as this duty was of the utmoſt importance, our bleſſed Saviour, to ſhew us more clearly the nature and uſe of chriſtian watchfulneſs, to which he exhorts us at the concluſion of the parable of the ten virgins, he added another, wherein he repreſented the different characters of a faithful and ſlothful ſervant, and the difference of their future acceptation.

This parable, like the former, is intended to ſtir us up to a zealous preparation for the coming of our Lord, by diligence in the diſcharge of our duty, and by a careful improvement of our ſouls in holineſs; and at the ſame time to expoſe the vain pretences of hypocrites, and to demonſtrate, that fair ſpeeches and outward form, without the power of godlineſs, will be of no ſervice in the laſt day of accounts.

The Son of Man, ſaid he, may, with reſpect to his final coming to judge the world, be likened, "Unto a man travelling into a far country, who called his own ſervants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto

unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his ſeveral abilities: and ſtraitway took his journey." *Matt.* xxv. 14, 15.

Immediately on his maſter's departure he that had received the five talents loſt no time, but went and traded with the ſame, and his increaſe was equal to his induſtry and application; he made them other five talents. He that had received two talents did the ſame, and had equal ſucceſs. But he, that received one, very unlike the conduct of his fellow-ſervants, went his way, digged in the earth, and hid his Lord's money, idle, uſeleſs unemployed, and unimproved.

After a long time, and at an hour when they did not expect it, the Lord of thoſe ſervents returned, called them before him, and ordered them to give an account of their ſeveral truſts. Upon which he that had received five talents, as a proof of his fidelity, produced other five talents, ſaying, "Lord, thou deliveredſt unto me five talents, behold I have gained beſides them five talents more." *Matt.* xxv. 20. His Lord, highly applauding his induſtry and fidelity, ſaid to him, "Well done, thou good and faithful ſervant; thou haſt been faithful over a few things, I will make the ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." *Matt.* xxv. 21.

In like manner alſo, he that had received two talents declared he had gained two other; upon which he was honoured with the ſame applauſe, and admitted into the ſame joy with his fellow-ſervant; their maſter having regard to the induſtry and fidelity of his ſervants, not to the number of the talents only, but the greatneſs of their increaſe.

After this, he that had received the one talent came, and, with a ſhameful falſehood, to excuſe his vile indolence, ſaid, "Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou haſt not ſown, and gathering where thou haſt not ſtrawed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou haſt that is thine. *Matt.* xxv. 24, 25.

This perverſion of even the ſmalleſt portion of grace greatly excited the reſentment of his Lord, who anſwered, "Thou wicked and ſlothful ſervant, thou kneweſt that I reap where I ſowed not, and gather where I have not ſtrawed: thou oughteſt therefore to have put my money to the

the exchangers, and then, at my coming, I ſhould have received mine own with uſury. Take, therefore, the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath ſhall be given, and he ſhall have abundance; but from him that hath not ſhall be taken away, even that which he hath. And caſt ye the unprofitable ſervant into outer darkneſs; there ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of teeth." *Matt.* xxv. 26, &c.

Such is the parable of the talents, as delivered by our bleſſed Saviour; a parable containing the meaſures of our duty to God, and the motives that inforce it, all delivered in the plaineſt and ſimpleſt alluſion. But its views are ſo extenſive and affecting, that while it inſtructs the meaneſt capacity, it engages reverence and attention from the greateſt, and ſtrikes an impreſſion on the moſt improved underſtanding. We are to conſider God as our Lord and Maſter, the author and giver of every good gift, and ourſelves as his ſervants or ſtewards, who, in various inſtances and meaſures, have received from his goodneſs ſuch bleſſings and abilities, as may fit us for the ſeveral ſtations and offices of life to which his providence appoints us. But then we are to obſerve, that theſe are committed to us as a truſt or loan, for whoſe due management we are accountable to the donor.

If we faithfully acquit ourſelves of this probationary charge, we ſhall receive far greater inſtances of God's confidence and favour; but if we are remiſs and negligent, we muſt expect to feel his reſentment and diſpleaſure.

A time will come, and how near it may be none of us can tell, when our great Maſter will demand a particular account of every talent he hath committed to our care. This time may, indeed, be at a diſtance: for it is uncertain when the king of terrors will receive the awful warrant to terminate our exiſtence here below: yet it will certainly come, and our eternal happineſs or miſery depends upon it: ſo that we ſhould have it continually in our thoughts, and engrave it, as with the point of a diamond, on the table of our hearts.

We learn from this inſtructive parable, that infinite wiſdom hath entruſted men with different talents, and adjuſted them to the various purpoſes of human life. But though the gifts of men are unequal, none can, with juſtice complain, ſince whatever

whatever is beſtowed, be it more or leſs, is a favour entirely unmerited.

Each then ſhould be thankful, and ſatisfied with his portion; and, inſtead of envying the more liberal endowments of others, apply himſelf to the improvement of his own. And it ſhould be attentively obſerved, that the difficulty of the taſk is in proportion to the number of talents committed to each. He who had received five was to gain other five; and he who had received two, was to account for other two.

Surely then, we have no reaſon to complain if our maſter has laid on us a lighter burden, a more eaſy and leſs ſervice, than what he has on others. Eſpecially as our intereſt, in the favour of the Almighty, does not depend on the number of our talents, but on our diligence and application in the management of them: ſo that the moral deſign of this parable is to engage our utmoſt attention to improve ſuch talents as our heavenly Father has thought proper to beſtow upon us.

By theſe talents are principally meant the communications and graces of the Holy Spirit, which God beſtows in different meaſures, "divid ing to every man ſeverally as he w ill." And ſubordinate to theſe are all the means, opportunities, and abilities to exerciſe or improve their graces; all the advantages of ſtation, fortune, education, and whatever may enable us to do good; for we having received all we enjoy from God, are ſtrictly obliged to promote the wiſe ends for which he beſtows his favour. And here let us take a ſhort and imperfect view of what God has done for us. He has given us reaſon and underſtanding to diſcern good from evil and enquire into the cauſes, relations, and conſequences of things, to collect from them proper rules of judgment and actions. Indeed, ſince the fall, this faculty has been much obſcured; but ſtill it remains an univerſal gift of God to men; and though not equal in all, yet it is given to every man in ſuch meaſure, as is ſufficient for their direction, In the knowledge of our duty, and the purſuit of our happineſs, God has, by the goſpel, ſo graciouſly ſupplied the defect of reaſon, that the weakeſt underſtanding may know how to be happy; ſuch aſſiſtances of divine grace attend every chriſtian, if he will apply to God for it, as may enable him to direct his inclinations, govern his paſſions, and ſubdue his corrupt affections. Theſe talents of nature

nature are in ſome degree common to all men; and by the improvement of that grace which is conferred on every one, all have ſufficient to conduct them through the ſeveral ſtages of life, if they will uſe but proper diligence and application. But regard muſt be had to all the means for cultivating thoſe gifts of nature and grace, ſuch as all opportunities of inſtruction, the miniſtry, and ordinances of religion, the reproofs and example of good men, the occaſions offered, and the abilities given for the exerciſe of virtue. All theſe are talents, or gifts of God, depoſited with us, to be diligently made uſe of, and for which we are accountable to him.

We ſhall therefore proceed to ſhew what duty is required from us, in the improvement of theſe talents. It is here ſuppoſed, that theſe talents are improvable, or otherwiſe they would be of no uſe or value; and indeed we are bound, by the command of God, who has threatened to inflict ſeveral penalties, if we neglect to improve them.—And if they are not improved, they will not continue long with us, but be loſt; the fineſt parts and capacities, without proper culture, will make but a mean and contemptible figure. No knowledge can be preſerved, without uſe and exerciſe, and the ſame holds with regard to moral accompliſhments. It requires great care and attention to form a virtuous habit, but much more to preſerve it in its vigour. Unleſs we co-operare with the motions of God's grace, and cultivate it by uſe and application, its impreſſions will gradually wear out, and be loſt.—"The ſpirit of God will not always ſtrive with man." He gives us a ſtock to manage, equal to the ſervice he expects from us; but if we are ſlothful and negligent, and will not apply it to the purpoſes for which it was given, he will recal the uſeful gift. "Take from him (ſays he) the talent, and give it to him that hath ten talents. Let us, therefore, diligently improve every talent committed to us, becauſe this will be required of us, in the day of accounts, and if not improved, will be immediately taken from us. What this improvement implies, and how we may diſcharge this duty, is an inquiry of the neareſt concern to us. The proper improvement of all God's gifts is the employing them ſo, as may beſt promote his glory.

This is the end the Almighty has propoſed in our creation; in all the powers

powers he has endued us with, and in all the aids of grace he has vouchſafed us. Whatever other improvements we may make of them will not profit us, nor be admitted as any proof of our fidelity, in the day of reckoning. We may cultivate our underſtanding by learning and ſtudy, and extend our knowledge through all the ſubjects of human enquiry; but if our end be only to gratify our curioſity or our vanity, we are not ſerving God, but ourſelves; we may increaſe our portion of God's outward gifts, but if we only apply them to enlarge our own conveniencies, we are not making the improvements our Maſter expects; we may take pleaſure in our knowledge and fortune, rejoice in them as our portion and inſtrument in our preſent ſatisfaction; but we muſt ſtill remember, that in our reckoning with God, all theſe improvements of our capacities and abilities, will be added to our account. And the only uſe God will admit us to ſet in balance of our debt to him, is to employ them as means of increaſing and multiplying our virtues, or as inſtruments of exerciſing them in the work of piety and religion.

From hence we may infer, that there will be degrees of future glory and happineſs, proportioned to our eminence in the divine life, and the ſervice we have done to the cauſe of Chriſt.

Dreadful will be his caſe, who has ſquandered away the ſtock itſelf, ſuffered his gifts to periſh for want of uſe; or, by abuſing them to the ſervice of ſin, has provoked the Almighty to take them from him.

How ſhall the prodigal recal the fortune he has ſpent, and appeaſe the anger of his judge? The terrors of the Lord may juſtly affright him; but they ſhould not extinguiſh his endeavours in deſpair. He has loſt many excellent talents; but he who gave can reſtore. Indeed, the moſt circumſpect piety will, in the great day of accounts, want much to be forgiven; and muſt expect his reward from the mercy of his judge, not from the merit of his ſervice.—Let us then do all in our power to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. For though the awful day of the Lord may be at a great diſtance, yet the time allotted us to prepare for it is limited by the ſhort ſpace of human life. The night of death cometh, when no man can work. To-day, therefore, while it is called to-day, let us be diligent in the work of the Lord, correct our errors,

rors, and finiſh what is imperfect, that we may obtain his approbation, and make our calling and election ſure.

We ſhall now proceed to the third parable delivered at the ſame time by the bleſſed Jeſus, namely, that of the laſt judgment, "When the Son of Man (ſaid he) ſhall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then ſhall he ſit upon the throne of his glory. And before him ſhall be gathered all nations; and he ſhall ſeparate them, one from another, as a ſhepherd divideth his ſheep from the goats; and he ſhall ſet the ſheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left." *Matt.* xxv. 31. It is common, in the Old Teſtament, to compare good men to ſheep, on account of their innocence and uſefulneſs; and wicked men to goats for their exhorbitant luſts. Our bleſſed Saviour, however, does not purſue the allegory farther, but deſcribes the remaining, and indeed the greateſt part of this awful ſcene, in terms perfectly ſimple: ſo that though the ſenſe be profound, it is obvious.

Here the judgment of all nations, Gentiles, as well as Chriſtians, is exhibited: and the particulars on which theſe awful trials are to proceed, diſplayed by the great judge himſelf.

Here we learn, that we ſhall be condemned or acquitted, according as we have neglected or performed works of charity; works which flow from the great principles of faith and piety, and which the very heathens are, by the light of nature invited to perform. But we muſt not underſtand, that ſuch works merited this favour from the judge: no, all who are acquitted at that day, whether Heathen or Chriſtians, ſhall be acquitted ſolely on account of the righteouſneſs of Chriſt, the true, the only meritorious cauſe.

Good men can at beſt but conſider their preſent ſtate as a baniſhment from their native country. A ſtate in which they are often expoſed to innumerable temptations, to perſecutions, to poverty, to reproach, to contempt. But the conſideration that they are travelling towards the heavenly Jeruſalem, a city prepared for them, when the foundations of the world were laid, will be abundantly ſufficient to ſupport their ſpirits, and render them more than conquerors. The glory laid up for them in the manſions of eternity, and which the great judge, will, at the awful day of accounts, confer upon

upon them, will animate them to bear the violences of their oppreſſors, and even defy the malice of men and devils. Nay, they will behold with contempt the flouriſhing proſperity of the wicked, and look forward to that glorious and immortal crown, which will be given them by their great Redeemer. "Then ſhall the King ſay unto them on the right hand, Come, ye bleſſed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirſty, and ye gave me drink: I was a ſtranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was in priſon, and ye came unto me." *Matt.* xxv 34, &c.

The enraptured and amazed ſoul ſhall then aſk, with great reverence and humility, when they performed theſe ſervices? as they never ſaw him in want, and therefore could not aſſiſt him. "Lord, when ſaw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirſty, and gave thee drink? when ſaw we thee a ſtranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? or when ſaw we thee ſick and in priſon, and came unto thee? And the king ſhall anſwer, and ſay unto them, Verily, I ſay unto you, inſomuch as ye have done it unto one of the leaſt of theſe my brethren, ye have done it unto me." *Matt.* xxv. 37, &c.

This is truly aſtoniſhing! The united wiſdom of men and angels could never have diſcovered a more proper method to convey an idea of the warmth and force of the divine benevolence to the ſons of men, or offer a more forcible motive to charity, than that the Son of God ſhould, from his ſeat of judgment, in preſence of the whole race of mankind, and all the hoſts of bleſſed ſpirits from the courts of heaven, declare that all good offices done to the afflicted are done to himſelf. During the time of his dwelling with human nature in this vale of tears, he ſuffered unſpeakable injuries and afflictions: and therefore he conſiders all the diſtreſſed virtuous, as members of his body, loves them with the utmoſt tenderneſs, and is ſo greatly intereſted in their welfare, that he rejoices when they are happy, and grieves when they are diſtreſſed.

Perhaps the true reaſon why the grand inquiry ſhall reſt ſolely on the performance of duties is, that men, generally ſpeaking, conſider the neglect of duties as a matter of no great conſequence, but dread the commiſſion

commiſſion of crimes. And hence it happens, that while they keep themſelves free from the latter, they eaſily find excuſes for the former. And as there is not a more pernicious error, with regard to religion and morality, than this, the bleſſed Jeſus thought proper to give ſuch an account of the judgment, as ſhould prove the moſt ſolemn caution againſt it.

But as the iniquity turns wholly on the performance of duties, it has been aſked why the offices of charity only are mentioned, and no notice taken of the duties of piety; though the judge himſelf, upon another occaſion, declared theſe to be of more importance than the duties of charity ſo highly applauded in this parable? But thoſe who aſk this queſtion would do well to remember, that piety and charity cannot ſubſiſt ſeparately: piety, and its origin faith, always producing charity; and charity, wherever it ſubſiſts, neceſſary preſuppoſing piety.

This connection between piety and charity will evidently appear, if it be conſidered, that no man can be truly benevolent and merciful without loving thoſe diſpoſitions. Conſequently, he muſt love benevolence in God, that is, he muſt love God; for piety, or the love of God, is nothing elſe but the regard we cheriſh towards God, on account of his perfections.

Piety and charity being thus eſſentially connected together, it was abundantly ſufficient to examine the conduct of men, with regard to either of thoſe graces. In the parable, the inquiry is repreſented as turning upon the duties of charity, perhaps becauſe in this branch of goodneſs there is leſs room for ſelf-deceit than in the other. It is common for hypocrites, by a pretended zeal in the externals of religion, to make ſpecious pretences to extraordinary piety, and at the ſame time are totally deficient in charity; are covetous, unjuſt, rapacious, and proud, and conſequently deſtitute of all love for their Creator. But none can aſſume the appearance of charity, but by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, relieving the diſtreſſed, and performing other benevolent offices to their brethren.

The work of charity may, indeed, in ſome particular caſes, flow from other principles than thoſe of a pious and benevolent diſpoſition, as from vanity, or even views of intereſt; but then it ſhould be remembered, that

that a common degree of hypocriſy will hardly engage men to undertake them; they are by far too weighty duties, to be ſuſtained by thoſe falſe principles, and therefore are ſeldom counterfeited. Conſequently wherever a genuine, extenſive, and permanent charity is found, we may conclude, that there the love of God reigns in perfection.

Hence we learn that all pretences to goodneſs, without a principle of grace wrought in the heart, avails nothing in point of eternal ſalvation. At the ſame time, if we conſider it in its full light, it will give us no reaſon to hope well of ourſelves, if we are wanting in our duty to God; and that we ſhould not only be charitable, but grateful alſo, juſt, temperate, and blameleſs in all our dealings with mankind. For we ſhould remember, that the duty we owe to the Almighty is no other than what is due to men in the like circumſtances, and which it would be unjuſt in us to neglect. It conſiſts in diſpoſitions and actions, the ſame in kind but different in degree, proportionate to the perfection of the object.

He who loves and admires holineſs, juſtice, and truth in men, cannot but love thoſe perfections in God, that is, he muſt love God: ſo likewiſe, he that is truly grateful to any earthly benefactor cannot be ungrateful to one from whoſe bounty he receives all the good things he enjoys; and ſince ingratitude in men is nothing more than forgetting the benefit received, and the benefactor who conferred the favour; how can we acquit ourſelves from the charge of ingratitude to God, if we forget the obligations we lie under unto him, and are at no pains to return him thanks; that is, if we wholly neglect the external and internal exerciſes of devotion.

Since, therefore, the duty we owe to God is the ſame in kind with that we owe to man in like circumſtances, it will undeniably follow, that true morality can never exiſt where piety is wanting; and that thoſe who pretend to morality, and are deſtitute of piety, render themſelves ridiculous.

The awful judge himſelf has told us, that after he has paſſed the happy ſentence on the righteous, he will pronounce the following ſentence of condemnation upon the wicked: "Depart from me, ye curſed, into everlaſting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirſty,

thirſty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a ſtranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: ſick, and in priſon, and ye viſited me not. Then ſhall they alſo anſwer him, ſaying, Lord, when ſaw we thee an hungered, or a thirſt, or a ſtranger, or naked, or ſick, or in priſon, and did not miniſter unto thee? Then ſhall he anſwer them, ſaying, Verily, I ſay unto you, Inaſmuch as ye did it not to one of the leaſt of theſe, ye did it not to me." *Matt.* xxv. 41, &c.

It is remarkable, that our bleſſed Saviour has told us, that the fire of hell was not prepared for the wicked, but for the devil and his angels; but that the kingdom of heaven was prepared for the righteous. Perhaps he intended to teach us, that the original deſign of Omnipotence, was to render man happy, not miſerable; a ſtate of conſummate felicity was formed for the human race, at the time they were created; but the fire of hell was prepared for the devil and his angels immediately after their fall. And as wicked men joined with devils in their ſin of rebellion againſt the Almighty, they are doomed to ſhare with them in their puniſhment; a puniſhment of the heavieſt kind, a puniſhment of devils.

After having repreſented the ſentences that are to be paſſed on the righteous and the wicked, our Saviour cloſed the parable, in the following manner: "And theſe ſhall go away into everlaſting puniſhment: but the righteous into life eternal." *Matt.* xxv. 46.

Happy deciſion to the followers of the Lamb! awful ſentence to the workers of iniquity! may it excite us to pray for that grace, by which alone we ſhall obtain the former!

CHAP. XXXII.

Our bleſſed Lord is anointed by a poor but pious woman. The perfidious Judas conſents to betray his Maſter. The humble Jeſus waſhes the Feet of his Diſciples, and foretels the Diſciple who was to betray him into the Hands of his inveterate Enemies.

THE bleſſed Jeſus uſed frequently to retire in the evening from the city to the mount of Olives, and there ſpend the night, either in ſome village or the gardens, in order to avoid falling into the hands of his enemies. They did not, indeed, preſume to attack him, while he was ſurrounded by his followers in the day time: but, in all probability, had he lodged within the city, they would have apprehended him during the darkneſs and ſilence of the night. When

When our bleſſed Saviour had finiſhed theſe parables, he added a ſhort account of his own death, in order to fortify the diſciples againſt the greateſt trial they had yet met with; namely, the ſufferings of their Maſter. "And it came to paſs, when Jeſus had finiſhed all theſe ſayings, he ſaid unto his diſciples, Ye know that after two days is the feaſt of the paſſover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified. Then aſſembled together the chief prieſts, and the ſcribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high prieſt, who was called Caiaphas, and conſulted that they might take Jeſus by ſubtilty, and kill him. But they ſaid, Not on the feaſt day, leſt there be an uproar among the people." *Matt.* xxvi. 1, &c.

When the evening approached, our bleſſed Saviour, with his diſciples, repaired to Bethany, and entered the houſe of Simon the leper, probably one who had experienced the healing efficacy of his power. But while he ſat at meat, a woman, who had alſo, doubtleſs, been an object of his mercy, poured a box of precious ointment upon his head.

This action diſpleaſed the diſciples, who knew that their Maſter was not delighted with luxuries of any kind; and therefore they rebuked the woman, imagining that it would have been more acceptable to the Son of God, if the ointment had been ſold, and the money diſtributed among the ſons and daughters of poverty and affliction.

To reprove the diſciples, Jeſus told them, that it had pleaſed the divine Providence, to order that there ſhould always be perſons in neceſſitous circumſtances, that the virtuous might never want occaſions for exerciſing their charity; butthat thoſe who did not now teſtify their love to him would never more have the opportunity of doing it, as the time of his miniſtry was near at an end, when the king of terrors ſhould enjoy a ſhort triumph over his body; and therefore this woman had ſeaſonably anointed him for his burial. And to make them ſenſible of their folly, in blaming the woman for this her expreſſion of love to him, he aſſured them, that ſhe ſhould be highly celebrated for this action, in every part of the world, and her memory live to the lateſt period of time.

Judas Iſcariot, (one of the twelve, having been more forward than the reſt, in condemning the woman, though

though the rebuke was particularly directed to him) ſtung with the guilt of his own conſcience, roſe from the table, and went immediately into the city, to the high-prieſt's palace, where he found the whole counſel aſſembled. His paſſion would not ſuffer him to reflect on the horrid deed he was going to commit; he immediately promiſed, for the reward of thirty ſhekels of ſilver to betray into their hands his Lord and Maſter.

Having thus engaged with the rulers of Iſrael to put into their hands a perſon who had been long labouring for their ſalvation, who had often invited them, in the moſt pathetic manner, to embrace the benevolent terms of the goſpel, offered by the Almighty, he ſought an opportunity to betray him, in the abſence of the multitude.

Our Lord, who well knew that the time of his ſuffering drew nigh, deſired, therefore, to celebrate the paſſover with his diſciples. He was now going to finiſh the mighty work for which he came into the world: and therefore would not neglect to fulfil the ſmalleſt particular of the law of Moſes. He therefore ſent two of his diſciples into the city, to prepare a lamb, and make it ready, for eating the paſſover; telling them, that they ſhould meet a man, bearing a pitcher of water, who would conduct them to his houſe, and ſhew them a large upper room furniſhed, where they were to make ready for him, He was willing, in this laſt tranſaction, to convince his diſciples, that he knew every thing that ſhould befal him; that his ſufferings were all predetermined by the Almighty; and that they were all, on his own account, ſubmitting unto voluntarily.

When night approached, Jeſus left Bethany; and every thing being ready for him, at the time he entered into the city, he ſat down at the appointed hour. But knowing that his ſuffering was now near, he told his diſciples, in the moſt affectionate manner, that he had greatly longed to eat the paſſover with them before he ſuffered, in order to ſhew them the ſtrongeſt proofs of his love. Theſe proofs were to give them a pattern of humility and charity, by waſhing their feet; inſtructing them in the nature of his death, and a propitiatory ſacrifice; inſtituting the ſacrament, in commemoration of his ſufferings: comforting them by the tender diſcourſes, recorded, *John* xiv. xv. xvi. in which he gave them a variety of excellent directions, together

gether with many gracious promiſes; and recommending them to the kind protection of his heavenly Father. "With deſire, I have deſired to eat this paſſover with you, before I ſuffer. For I ſay unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

Having thus ſpoken, he aroſe from the table, laid aſide his garment like a ſervant, and with all the officiouſneſs of an humble miniſter, waſhed the feet of his deſciples without diſtinction, though one of them, Judas Iſcariot, was a monſter of impiety; that they might at once behold a conjunction of charity and humility, and ſelf-denial and indifference, repreſented by a perſon glorious beyond expreſſion, their great Lord and Maſter

He waſhed their feet (according to a cuſtom which prevailed in thoſe hot countries, both before and after meat,) in order to ſhew them an example of the utmoſt humility and condeſcenſion.

The Son of the omnipotent Father lays every thing aſide, that he may ſerve his followers: heaven ſtoops to earth, one abyſs calls upon another, and the miſeries of man, which were almoſt infinite, are exceeded by a mercy equal to the immenſity of the Almighty. He deferred this ceremony, which was a cuſtomary civility paid to honourable ſtrangers at the beginning of their feaſt, that it might be preparatory to the ſecond, which he intended ſhould be a feaſt to the whole world, when all the followers of the bleſſed Jeſus ſhould have an opportunity, in a ſpiritual manner, of feeding on his fleſh, and drinking his blood.

When our bleſſed Saviour came to Peter, he modeſtly declined it; but his Maſter told him, if he refuſed to ſubmit implicitly to all his orders, he could have no part with him. On which Peter cried out, "Lord, not my feet only, but alſo my hands and my head." But Jeſus told him, that the perſon who had bathed himſelf had no reaſon to waſh any part of the body, except his feet, which he might have dirtied by walking from the bath. And added, Ye are all clean, as to the outward laver, but not as to the inward and ſpiritual laver: I well know that one of you will betray me.

When our gracious Lord had finiſhed this menial ſervice, he aſked his diſciples, if they knew the meaning of what he had done, as the action was purely emblematical? You truly, added

added he, ſtile me Maſter and Lord, for I am the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. But if I, your Maſter and your Lord, have condeſcended to waſh your feet, you ſurely ought to perform, with the utmoſt pleaſure, the humbleſt offices of charity one to another. I have ſet you a pattern of humility, and I recommend it to you.

And certainly nothing can more effectually ſhew us the neceſſity of this heavenly temper of mind than its being recommended to us by ſo great an example; a recommendation, which, in the preſent circumſtances, was particularly ſeaſonable; for the diſciples having heard their great Maſter declare, that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, their minds were filled with ambitious thoughts. And therefore our bleſſed Saviour added, Ye need not be aſhamed to follow my example in this particular; for no ſervant can think it beneath him to condeſcend to perform thoſe actions his lord had done before him. And therefore if he know his duty, he will be happy if he practiſe it. He moreover added, that though he had called them all to the apoſtleſhip, and well knew the ſecret diſpoſitions of every heart, before he choſe them, they need not be ſurpriſed, that one among them ſhould prove a traitor, as it was done, that the ſcripture might be fulfilled, "He that eateth bread with me hath lift up his heel againſt me."

As our bleſſed Saviour was now to be but a ſhort time with his diſciples, he thought proper to take his farewel of them, which he did in the moſt affectionate manner. Theſe melancholy tidings greatly troubled them. They were unwilling to part with ſo kind a friend, ſo dear a maſter, ſo wiſe a guide, and ſo profitable a teacher; eſpecially as they thought they ſhould be left in a forlorn condition, a poor and helpleſs prey to the rage and hatred of a blind and malicious generation. They ſeemed willing to die with their Lord, if that might be accepted. Why cannot I follow thee! I will lay down my life for thee was the language of one, and even all of them; but they could not ſupport the thoughts of a diſconſolate ſeparation.

Their great and compaſſionate Maſter, ſeeing them thus dejected, endeavoured to cheer their drooping ſpirits; "Let not your hearts be troubled." Liſten attentively to what I am going to deliver for your conſolation, "I am going to prepare a place for you; I will come again and

and receive you to myſelf, that where I am, there you may be alſo." A reviving admonition! They were one day to meet again their dear, their affectionate Maſter, in a place where they ſhould live together to all eternity.

But death makes ſo vaſt a diſtance between friends, and the diſciples then knew ſo little of a future ſtate, that they ſeemed to doubt, whether they ſhould, after their parting, meet their great Redeemer. They neither knew the place where he was going, nor the way that led to his kingdom. "Lord (ſaid they) as we know not whither thou goeſt, how can we know the way?" In anſwer to this queſtion, he told them, that he was "the way, the truth, and the light;" as if he had ſaid, through the propitiatory ſacrifice I am about to offer; the ſacred truths I have delivered, and the divine aſſiſtance, which I ſhall hereafter diſpenſe, you are to obtain that happineſs which I go to prepare for you.

But, leſt all theſe arguments ſhould not be ſufficient to quiet their minds, he had ſtill another, which could not fail of ſucceſs; "If ye love me, ſays he, ye will rejoice, becauſe I ſaid I go to the Father:" intimating, that he would conſider it as a proof of their love to him, if they ceaſed to mourn. They doubtleſs thought, that by grieving for his death, they expreſſed their love to their Maſter; and it ſhould ſeem ſtrange that our Saviour ſhould put ſo contrary an interpretation on their friendly ſorrow, or require ſo unnatural a thing of them, as to rejoice at his departure. What! (might they think) ſhall we rejoice at ſo amiable a friend's removal from us; or can we be glad, that he retires and leaves us in this vale of miſery? No, it is impoſſible; the human heart, on ſo melancholy an occaſion, can have no diſpoſition to rejoice.

Our bleſſed Saviour, therefore, adds his reaſon to ſolve the ſeeming paradox; becauſe he was going to the Father: that is, he was going to aſcend to the right hand of infinite power, from whence he would ſend them all the aſſiſtance they could deſire. It muſt not, however, be ſuppoſed, that he meant by theſe words, that his diſciples ſhould not be concerned at his death, or that they could not love him unleſs they expreſſed a viſible joy on this occaſion. That would, indeed, have been an hard interpretation of their

grief: he knew their grief flowed from love; and that if their love had been ſtrong, their ſorrow had been much leſs. Indeed, their Maſter was fully convinced that love was the occaſion of their ſorrow; and therefore he uſed theſe arguments to mitigate it, and direct it in a proper courſe.

Nor did our Lord intend to intimate, that all ſorrow for ſo worthy a friend was unlawful, or an unbecoming expreſſion of their love; doubtleſs he was not diſpleaſed to ſee his diſciples ſo tenderly affected at his removal from them. He who ſhed tears at the grave of Lazarus, blended with ſighs and groans, cannot be thoguht to forbid them wholly at his own. He therefore did not chide his diſciples with angry reproaches, as though they had been intirely in the wrong, but gently reaſoned with them by kind perſuaſion, "Let not your hearts be troubled," as rather pitying than condemning their ſorrow.

Soon after Jeſus had ſpoken theſe things, his heart was greatly troubled, to think that one of his diſciples ſhould prove his enemy; he complained of it at the table, declaring that one of them ſhould betray him. This moving declaration greatly affected the diſciples; and they began every one of them to ſay to their maſter, "Lord, is it I?" But Jeſus giving them no deciſive anſwer, John, the beloved diſciple, whoſe ſweet diſpoſition and other amiable qualities, is perpetuated in the peculiar love his great maſter bore him, and was now reclining on his boſom, aſked him, who among the diſciples could be guilty of ſo deteſtable a crime? Jeſus told him that the perſon to whom he ſhould give the ſop, when he had dipped it, was he who ſhould betray him. Accordingly as ſoon as he had dipped the ſop in the diſh, he gave it to Judas Iſcariot, ſaying to him, at the ſame time, "what thou doeſt, do quickly."

Judas received the ſop, without knowing any thing of what his Maſter had told the beloved diſciple: nor did any of the diſciples, except St. John, entertain the leaſt ſuſpicion that Judas was the perſon who would betray their Maſter.

The innocent diſciples were, indeed, ſo deeply affected with his declaration, that one of them ſhould betray him, that they did not remark the words of Jeſus to his apoſtate diſciple; but continued to aſk

him,

him, who was the perſon that ſhould be guilty of ſo unnatural a crime? Willing at laſt to ſatisfy their importunity, the bleſſed Jeſus declared, that the perſon who dipped his hand with him in the diſh, ſhould betray him. This to the eleven was a joyful declaration, but confounding in the higheſt degree to Judas. Impudent as he was, it ſtruck him ſpeechleſs, pointing him out plainly, and diſplaying the foulneſs of his heart,

While Judas continued mute with confuſion, the bleſſed Jeſus declared that his death ſhould be brought about according to the decrees of heaven, though that would not, in the leaſt, mitigate the crime of the perſon who betrayed him; adding, "it had been good for that man if he had not been born." Judas having now recovered himſelf a little, aſſerted his innocence by a queſtion which implied a denial of the charge. But his Maſter ſoon ſilenced him, by poſitively affirming that he really was the perſon.

As various conjectures have been formed concerning the motives which induced the perfidious Judas cruelly to deliver up his innocent Maſter into the hands of his enemies, it may not be improper to cite thoſe which appear to us moſt probable, though the deciſion muſt be intirely left to the reader.

Some are of opinion, that he was induced to commit this villainy by the reſentment of the rebuke given him by his Maſter, for blaming the woman who came with the precious ointment, and anointed the head of Jeſus, as he ſat at meat, in the houſe of Simon the leper. But though this had, doubtleſs, its weight with the traitor, yet it could not, we think, be his only motive, becauſe the rebuke was given in general to all the diſciples, who had, perhaps, been equally forward with him in cenſuring the woman. Nor can we imagine, even if he had been rebuked alone, that ſo mild a reproof could provoke any perſon, however wicked, to the horrid act of murdering his friend, much leſs Judas, whoſe covetous diſpoſition muſt have diſpoſed him to bear every thing from his Maſter, from whom he expected the higheſt preferment, when he openly declared himſelf the Meſſiah, and took the reins of government into his own hands.

Others think that Judas betrayed his Maſter through covetouſneſs. But if we underſtand by covetouſneſs the reward given by the prieſts, this

this opinion is equally defective; for the ſum was too ſmall for the moſt covetous wretch to think equivalent to the life of a friend, eſpecially when he expected from him the higheſt poſts and advantages.

Others attribute the perfidy of Judas to his doubting whether his Maſter was the Meſſiah; and that he betrayed him in a fit of deſpair. But of all the ſolutions this is the worſt founded. For if Judas believed his Maſter to be an impoſtor, he muſt have obſerved ſomething in his behaviour which led him to form ſuch an opinion of him; and in that caſe, he would, doubtleſs, have mentioned it to the chief prieſts and elders, when he made the contract with them; which it is plain he did not, as they would have reminded him of it, when he came back and expreſſed his remorſe for what he had done.

It ſhould alſo be obſerved, that had Judas given them any intimations of this kind, they would doubtleſs have urged them againſt our bleſſed Saviour himſelf, in the courſe of his trial, when they were at ſo great a loſs for witneſs to ſupport their accuſations; and againſt the apoſtles, afterwards, when they reproved them for ſpeaking in the name of Jeſus. Beſides, had Judas thought his Maſter an impoſtor, and propoſed nothing by his treachery, but the price he put upon his life, how came he to ſell him for ſuch a trifle, when he well knew that the chief prieſts and rulers would have given him any ſum, rather than not have gotten him into their hands?

In fine, the ſuppoſition that Judas believed his Maſter to be an impoſtor, is directly confuted by the ſolemn declaration he made to the prieſts, when he declared the deepeſt conviction of the innocence of our great Redeemer. "I have ſinned, ſaid he, in betraying the innocent blood."

It muſt be remembered, that the remorſe he felt for his crime, when he ſaw his Maſter condemned, was too bitter to be endured; ſo that he fled even to the king of terrors for relief.

The Evangeliſt, St. John, tells us, that he was of ſo covetous a diſpoſition, as to ſteal money out of our Lord's bag; and hence we have ſufficient reaſon to believe, that he firſt followed Jeſus with a view of obtaining riches, and other temporal advantages, which he expected the Meſſiah's friends would enjoy.

It likewiſe authorizes us to think, that

that as he had hitherto reaped none of theſe advantages, he might grow impatient under the delay; and the rather, as Jeſus had lately diſencouraged all ambitious views among his diſciples, and neglected to embrace the opportunity of erecting his kingdom, which was offered him by the multitude, who accompanied him into Jeruſalem, with ſhouts, and crying, Hoſanna, to the Son of David. His impatience, therefore, becoming exceſſive, inſpired him with the thought of delivering his Maſter into the hands of the council, firmly perſuaded that he would then be obliged to aſſume the dignity of the Meſſiah, and conſequently be able to reward his followers. For as this court was compoſed of the chief prieſts, elders and ſcribes, that is, the principal perſons of the ſacerdotal order, the repreſentatives of the great families, and the doctors of the law; the traitor did not doubt but his Maſter, when brought before ſo auguſt an aſſembly, would aſſert his pretenſions to the title of Meſſiah, prove his claim to their full conviction, gain them over to his intereſt, and immediately enter to his regal dignity. And though he muſt be ſenſible that the meaſures he took to compaſs this intention were very offenſive to his Maſter, yet he might think the ſucceſs of it would procure his pardon from ſo compaſſionate a Maſter, and even recommend him to favour. In the mean time his project, however plauſible it may appear to one of his turn, was far from being free from difficulty: and therefore while he revolved it in his own mind, many things might occur to ſtagger his reſolution. At length, thinking himſelf affronted by the rebuke of Jeſus, at the time when the woman anointed the head of his Maſter, he was provoked to execute the reſolution he had formed of obliging him to alter his meaſures. Riſing, therefore, directly from the table, he went immediately into the city, to the palace of the high prieſt, where he found the council aſſembled, conſulting how they might take Jeſus by ſubtilty, in the abſence of the multitude.

To them he made known his intention of delivering his Maſter into their hands; and undertook, for a ſmall ſum of money, to conduct a band of armed men to the place where the Saviour of the world uſually ſpent the night with his diſciples, where they might apprehend him without the leaſt danger of a tumult.

Some reaſons may be offered in ſupport of this opinion concerning the motives which induced Judas to betray his Maſter.—Firſt, From the nature of the contract, "What will ye give me, (ſaid he) and I will deliver him unto you?" He did not mean that he would deliver him up to be put to death; for though the prieſts had conſulted among themſelves, how they might deſtroy Jeſus, they had not been ſo abominably wicked as to declare their intention publickly; they only propoſed to bring him to trial, for aſſuming the character of the Meſſiah, and to treat him as it ſhould appear he deſerved. The offer, therefore, which Judas made them of delivering him up, was in conformity to their public reſolutions. Nor did they underſtand it in any other light; for, had the prieſts thought that his deſign in this was to get his maſter puniſhed with death, they muſt alſo have thought he believed him to be an impoſtor; in which caſe they would doubtleſs, have produced him as one of their principal evidences, no perſon being more proper. Alſo when Judas returned to them with the money, declaring that he had ſinned, in betraying the innocent blood, inſtead of replying, "What is that to us, ſee thou to that?" It was the moſt natural thing in the world to have upbraided him with the ſtain he had put upon his Maſter's character, by the contract they had made with him.

It is true, they called the money they gave him, "the price of blood:" but they did not mean this in the ſtricteſt ſenſe, as they had neither hired Judas to aſſaſſinate his Maſter, nor can they be ſuppoſed to have charged themſelves with the guilt of murdering him. It was only the price of blood, conſequently being the reward they had given to the traitor, for putting it in their power to take away the life of Chriſt, under the colour and form of public juſtice. Now it may be doubted, whether Judas aſked the money as a reward of his ſervice. He covetouſly, indeed, kept it; and the prieſts, for that reaſon, called it the price of blood.

In ſhort, Judas knew that the rulers could not take away the life of any perſon whatſoever, the Romans having deprived them of that power, and therefore could have no deſign of this kind in delivering him up: not to mention that it was a common opinion among the Jews, that the

the Meſſiah could never die: an opinion that Judas might eaſily embrace, having ſeen his Maſter raiſe ſeveral perſons, and among the reſt one who had been in the grave no leſs than four days.

Another reaſon which may be aſſigned, in confirmation of this opinion, is, the traitor's hanging himſelf, when he found him condemned, not by the governor, but by the council, whoſe prerogative it was to judge prophets. Had Judas propoſed to take away the life of his Maſter, the ſentence of condemnation paſſed upon him, inſtead of filling him with deſpair, muſt have gratified him, being the accompliſhments of his project, whereas the light wherein we have endeavoured to place his conduct, ſhews this circumſtance to have been perfectly natural.

He knew him to be thoroughly innocent, and expected that he would have wrought ſuch miracles before the council as ſhould have conſtrained them to believe. Therefore, when he found that nothing of this kind was done, and that the prieſts had paſſed the ſentence of condemnation upon him, and were carrying him to the governor to get it executed, he repented of his raſh and covetous project, came to the chief prieſts and elders, the perſons to whom he had betrayed him, offered them their money again, and ſolemnly declared the deepeſt conviction of his Maſter's innocence, hoping that they would have deſiſted from the perſecution. But they were obſtinate, and would not relent; upon which his remorſe aroſe to ſuch a pitch, that, unable to ſupport the torments of his conſcience, he went and hanged himſelf.

Thus it is probable, that the traitor's intention in delivering up his Maſter, was not to get him puniſhed with death, but only to lay him under a neceſſity of proving his pretenſions before the grandees, whom he had hitherto ſhunned; thinking, that if they had yielded, the whole nation would immediately have been raiſed forthwith to the ſummit of their expectations.

This account of Judas's conduct is by no means calculated to leſſen the foulneſs of his crime, which was the blackeſt imaginable. For even in the light above-mentioned, it implied both an inſatiable avarice, and a wilful oppoſition to the counſels of Providence, and rendered the actor of it a diſgrace to human nature. But it is calculated to ſet the credibility of the traitor's action in

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a proper light, and to ſhew that he was not moved to it by any thing ſuſpicious in the character of his Maſter: becauſe, according to his view of it, his perfidy, inſtead of implying that he entertained ſuſpicions of his Maſter's integrity, plainly proves that he had the fulleſt conviction of his being the Meſſiah. Nor was it poſſible for any one, who had been preſent at the miracles which Jeſus wrought, and the doctrines which he delivered, to admit of a doubt of his being the Son of God, the Saviour of mankind: unleſs blinded by the moſt obſtinate prejudice.

CHAP. XXXIII.

Jeſus inſtitutes the Sacrament in Commemoration of his Death and Sufferings. Settles a Diſpute which aroſe among his Diſciples. Predicts Peter's Cowardice in denying his Maſter. Fortifying his Diſciples againſt the approaching Shock. Foretells Peter's Cowardice again. Preaches to and prays with his Diſciples, for the laſt Time. Paſſionate Addreſs of our Lord to his Father, in the Garden.

THE great Redeemer, ever mindful of the grand deſign of his miſſion, even the ſalvation of loſt and periſhing ſinners, was not in the leaſt affected by the treachery of his apoſtate diſciple. For knowing that he muſt become a ſacrifice for ſin, &c. he inſtituted the ſacrament of his ſupper, to perpetuate the memory of it throughout all ages. Accordingly, as they were eating the paſchal ſupper, "Jeſus took bread, and bleſſed it, and brake it, and gave it to his diſciples, and ſaid, Take, eat: This is my body." *Matt.* xxvi. 26. Obſerve this rite no longer in remembrance of your deliverance from Egypt, but in remembrance of me; who, by dying for you, will bring you out of the ſpiritual bondage; a bondage far worſe than the Egyptian, under which your fathers groaned, and will eſtabliſh you in the glorious liberty of the children of God. Do it in remmebrance of me, who, by laying down my life will ranſom you from ſin, from death, from hell, and will ſet open the gates of heaven to you, that you may enter immortality in triumph.

Having given the bread to his diſciples, he alſo took the cup, and gave it to them, ſaying, "Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood of the New Teſtament, which is ſhed for many for the remiſſion of ſins." *Matt.* xxvi. 27, 28. All of you, and all of my diſciples, in all ages, muſt drink of this cup, becauſe it repreſents my blood ſhed for the remiſſion

miſſion of the ſins of mankind; my blood by which the new covenant between God and man is ratified. It is, therefore, my blood of the new covenant; ſo that this inſtitution exhibits to your joyful meditation the grand baſis of the hopes of the children of men, and perpetuates the memory of it, to the end of the world. He added, "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." *Matt.* xxvi. 29.

The manifeſtation of the ſon of God is of the moſt illuſtrious, the moſt momentous event that is poſſible to engage the meditations of mankind. To his life and death, his reſurrection and aſcenſion into glory, we are indebted for our hopes and aſſurances of pardon, for our peace, for our happineſs. To procure our benefit, he made the moſt amazing condeſcenſion from the dignity he enjoyed with his father, by putting on the veil of fleſh; he poured divine inſtruction from his lips, and ſhone forth with an all-perfect, and all-lovely example. For our benefit he ſubmitted to a courſe of the moſt cruel treatment of his bitter enemies, to the agonies of the croſs, and to the ſtroke of the king of terrors. For our benefit he aroſe again with power and luſtre, aſcended into the manſions of eternal happineſs, manages our affairs with the Almighty, and holdeth the reins of government. With the greateſt wiſdom and goodneſs, therefore, this beneficent Jeſus inſtituted a rite, that ſhould recal his love to our memories, and awake each pious paſſion in our breaſt; a rite, which, by the breaking of bread, and the pouring out of wine, ſhould repreſent to us, in a ſtriking manner, that moſt ſignal proof of the affection both of him and his heavenly father, when his tender frame was expoſed to wounds and bruiſes, when ſtreams of the moſt precious blood iſſued from his ſacred veins.

The more we reflect on this inſtance of divine love, the more we ſhall perceive that there was a peculiar propriety in pointing out, by a particular ordinance, a fact of ſuch immenſe importance in the ſcheme of revelation. Nay, we may even venture to aſſert, that in ſome dark and corrupt ages, when the ſcriptures were little known by the common people, and hardly ſtudied by the prieſts, the death of our Saviour would have been almoſt forgotten,

had not the remembrance of it been renewed by the celebration of this ſacred ordinance.

It ſhould alſo be remembered, that the vanities of the world, the allurements of ſenſual pleaſure, the charms of ambition, the ſplendor of riches; in ſhort, temptations from preſent objects of every kind, have often too fatal an influence on our temper and conduct. They have a fatal aptitude to draw the ſoul aſide to folly, and to obliterate the impreſſion of things divine. It was, therefore, a wiſe, a kind intention of our great Redeemer, by a frequent repetition of the ſacramental feaſt, to call back the wandering heart of man to a ſenſe of his duty and obligations as a chriſtian.

Beſides, though the religion of the immaculate Jeſus is altogether gentle, generous, and beneficent; though its whole tendency is to correct the paſſions ſweeten the diſpoſitions, and enlarge the affections of men, and though it enforces all this upon us by motives ſurpriſingly powerful and affecting; yet ſuch is the perverſeneſs of the human heart, that jealouſies and contentions, envy, wrath, and malice, too often find admittance there. Was it not then an inſtance of our Saviour's wiſdom and benevolence, by uniting us together at the ſacrament of his body and blood, to urge the putting away all bitterneſs, anger, evil-ſpeaking, and revenge; and to inſpire us with condeſcenſion, compaſſion and love?

How careful, therefore, ought we to be in performing this duty appointed by our dying Saviour! We ſhould, in order to receive it worthily, employ our meditation on the deſign and excellency of the goſpel; on the noble ſyſtem of the doctrines and duties it contains; on the illuſtrious, divine, and complete example of the bleſſed Jeſus; of the important privileges, the valuable promiſes, and the raviſhing proſpects his revelation affords; and on the bright and convincing evidence with which it is attended.

We ſhould contemplate that eſſential and unparalleled benevolence of the Father, in forming the ſcheme of our redemption; on the readineſs manifeſted by the Son of God in undertaking our cauſe; and on his wonderful tranſactions in the proſecution of this grand, this amazing work. Above all, we ſhould impreſs upon our ſouls a ſtrong ſenſe of the ſpecial and immediate purpoſes for which this ſacrament was appointed.

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When we actually join in communion, we ſhould be careful that our affections be properly directed, and warmly engaged. To have our hearts fixed upon the vanities, the profits, and the cares of this world, is a direct violation of the ordinance; and therefore we ſhould be extremely careful to maintain a right temper and behaviour at that time. We ſhould ſtudy to abſtract our thoughts as much as poſſible from every foreign, every terreſtrial conſideration, and to have our paſſions fervently employed in the ſolemn ſervice. "Retire, oh my ſoul (each of us ſhould ſay) from this inferior ſcene of things: from all its pleaſures and all its purſuits, and hold communion with the Almighty, and his Son the immaculate Jeſus. Meditate upon that infinite grace of Omnipotence, which contrived the amazing plan, that diſplayed pardon, peace, and endleſs happineſs, to ſo undeſerving a creature as thou art. Recollect that ſurprizing condeſcenſion and tenderneſs of thy compaſſionate Redeemer, which induced him to bring down from heaven ſalvation to the ſons of men. Call to mind the admirable inſtructions he offered, the charming pattern he exhibited, the hard labours and ſufferings he endured, in the courſe of his miniſtry; eſpecially call to mind the ignominy, the reproaches, the agonies he endured, when he hung on the croſs, and purchaſed for thee eternal mercy. Think upon theſe affecting ſubjects, till thine heart is filled with ſorrow for thine iniquities; till thy faith become lively, active and faithful; till thy gratitude and love are elevated to the higheſt pitch; till thy obedience is rendered uniform, ſteady and complete. Haſt thou, oh my God, and parent of univerſal nature, haſt thou ſo illuſtriouſly manifeſted thy compaſſion for ſinners as not to ſpare thine own ſon? Haſt thou ſent the Saviour into the lower world, in order to raiſe the children of men to immortality, perfection, and glory? And am I now in thy preſence on purpoſe to celebrate this inſtitution, who requireth me to commemorate the death of the great Meſſiah: to declare my public acceptance of his excellent revelation, and my regard to my chriſtian brethren? May then the remembrance of his beneficence dwell upon my mind, and upon my tongue, for ever and ever! May I conſider and comply with the intention of his goſpel; and may the ſentiments of kindneſs and charity towards all my fellow-mortals and fellow-diſciple,

low-diſciples, reign in my breaſt, with increaſing purity, with increaſing zeal!"

Such are the views that ſhould poſſeſs our ſouls, when we partake of this ſacred ordinance; but it will ſignify little to entertain theſe views, at that time, unleſs the effects of them are apparent in our future conduct and converſation; for a tranſient flow of affections, or ſallies of immediate delight, were not principally intended in this inſtitution.

The bleſſed Jeſus did not ordain it as a ceremony or charm, but as a proper method of eſtabliſhing our hearts in the fear and love of God, who gave his only beloved Son to die for wretched ſinners. Though ye have therefore, oh chriſtians! obeyed the Redeemer's command, in this appointment, and found your paſſions greatly moved, yet this is not the whole required at your hands: it will juſtly be expected, that ye ſhould live to the honour of your divine maſter. As you have ſolemnly profeſſed your faith in him, and your love towards him, the reality of your faith and love ſhould be demonſtrated by walking more ſtrictly in the way of his precepts, and by abounding in that heavenly character and temper which his ſpotleſs example ſo engagingly recommends. Thus only will the ſacrament become ſubſervient to the moſt beneficial purpoſes. Thus only will it be inſtrumental in qualifying us for ſharing in the dignity and felicity poſſeſſed by our exalted Saviour.

May, therefore, all the followers of the immaculate Jeſus, by uniting together at his ſacred table, advance from holineſs to holineſs, till they arrive at the regions of eternal felicity!

Our bleſſed Saviour, after delivering the ſacramental cup, and telling them that his blood was ſhed for them, mentioned the treachery of Judas, a ſecond time. "Behold he is at hand that doth betray me." *Matt.* xxvi. 46. This ſecond declaration was made very properly after the inſtitution of the ſacrament, which exhibits the higheſt inſtance of our great Redeemer's love to mankind, his dying to obtain the remiſſion of their ſins; for it abundantly proves, that the perſon, who could deliberately be guilty of ſuch an injury, to ſo kind a friend, muſt have been a monſter, the foulneſs of whoſe ingratitude cannot be reached by the force of language.

Some of the diſciples, particularly ſtruck with horror at the thought of Judah's

Judas's treachery, rebuked him, by aſking him with ſurprize, how he could betray his Maſter? This accuſation Judas no doubt repelled, by impudently denying the fact: but conſciouſneſs of guilt giving edge to the reproaches of his brethren, and to every circumſtance of the affair, he immediately left the company, exceedingly diſpleaſed at thinking himſelf inſulted and affronted.

The important, the awful ſcene now approached, when the great work was to be finiſhed. The traitor Judas was gone to the chief prieſts and elders, for a band of ſoldiers to apprehend him; but this did not diſcompoſe the Redeemer of mankind: he took occaſion to meditate on the glory that would accrue, both to himſelf and to the Almighty, from thoſe ſufferings, and ſpake of it to his diſciples. "Now (ſaid he) is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him." He alſo told them, that, having already done honour to his Father, by the paſt actions of his life, and being about to honour him yet farther, by his ſufferings and death, which would diſplay his perfections, particularly his infinite love to the human race, in the moſt aſtoniſhing and amiable light, he was in his turn to receive honour from his Father; intimating that his human nature was to be exalted to the right hand of Omnipotence; and that his miſſion from God was to be ſupported by irrefragable atteſtations. But his diſciples, imagining that he ſpake of the glory of a temporal kingdom, their ambition was again revived, and they began to diſpute with as much keenneſs as ever, which of them ſhould be greateſt in that kingdom. This contention Jeſus compoſed by the arguments he had formerly uſed for the ſame purpoſe. Among the Gentiles, ſaid he, they are reckoned the greateſt who have the greateſt power, and have exerciſed it in the moſt abſolute manner: but your greatneſs ſhall be very different from theirs; it ſhall not conſiſt in being unlimited with regard to tyrannical power, even though it ſhould be joined with an affectation of titles, which denote qualities truly honourable; but whoſoever deſires to be great, or chief among you, let him be ſo by his humility, and the ſervice he renders to the reſt, in imitation of me, your Maſter, whoſe greatneſs conſiſts in this, that I am become the ſervant of you all. Adding, as they had continued with him in this temptation, he would beſtow upon them

ſuch a kingdom as his father had appointed for him. At the ſame time, to check their ambition, and lead them to form a juſt notion of his kingdom, he told them, that he was ſoon to leave them, and that whither he was going, they could not at that time follow him; for which reaſon, inſtead of contending with one another which of them ſhould be the greateſt, they would do well to be united among themſelves, in the happy bond of love. For by loving one another ſincerely and fervently, they would prove themſelves his diſciples, to the conviction of mankind, who could not be ignorant that love was a diſtinguiſhed part of his character.

This is termed a new commandment, not becauſe mutual love had never been enjoined to mankind before, but becauſe, it was a precept of peculiar excellency; for the world, tranſlated New, in the Hebrew language, denotes excellency and truth; he alſo called this a new commandment, becauſe they were to exerciſe it under a new relation, according to a new meaſure, and from new motives. They were to love one another, in the relation of his diſciples, and in that degree of love which he had ſhewed to them; for they were to lay down their lives for the brethren.

This excellent doctrine, however, did not make ſuch an impreſſion on Peter, as the words which Jeſus had ſpoken concerning a place, whither his diſciples could not come. He therefore replied, by aſking, where he was going? To which Jeſus anſwered, "Whither I go, thou canſt not follow me now, but ſhall follow me afterward."

In order to make his diſciples farther humble, watchful, and kindly affectionate one towards another, he aſſured them that Satan was ſeeking to ruin them all by his temptations. "And the Lord ſaid, Simon, Simon, Behold Satan hath deſired to have you, that he might ſift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted ſtrengthen thy brethren." Peter was greatly offended that his maſter ſhould have ſingled him out as the weakeſt: for ſo he interpreted his praying for him, particularly: and ſuppoſing that he mentioned Satan's ſeeking to ſift him, as the thing which would hinder him from following his Maſter, replied, Why cannot I follow thee, now? Is there any road more terrible than the dark valley of the ſhadow of death? Yet through

through theſe black and gloomy ſhades I am willing this moment to accompany thee.

Jeſus, knowing his weak, though ſincere reſolution, anſwered, Art thou ſo very confident of thine own ſtrength? I tell thee, that this very night, before the cock crows, thou ſhalt thrice deny me to be thy Maſter.

Our bleſſed Saviour having finiſhed what he had to ſay to Peter in particular, turned himſelf to his other diſciples, and put them in mind that when they were firſt ſent out, he directed them to rely wholly upon the Almighty for aſſiſtance.

When I ſent you formerly, ſaid he, to preach the goſpel, you may remember I ordered you to go without any proviſion, either for your ſuſtenance or defence, aſſuring you, that, though you would indeed meet with great oppoſition, yet Providence would diſpoſe ſome men in all places to be your friends, and to furniſh you with all neceſſaries: and accordingly you found that you wanted for nothing, but were wonderfully ſupported, without any care or proviſion of your own, in the whole journey, and finiſhed your work with ſucceſs. But now the caſe is very different: the time of that greateſt trial and diſtreſs, whereof I have often forewarned you, is juſt at hand; and you may now make all the proviſion in your power, and arm yourſelves againſt it, as much as you are able.

I have finiſhed the work for which I was ſent into the world; and nothing now remains for me, but to undergo thoſe ſufferings which the prophets have foretold concerning me, and to complete this whole diſpenſation of Providence, by ſubmitting at laſt to a cruel and ignominious death.

The diſciples, thinking their great maſter meant that they ſhould arm themſelves in a literal ſenſe, and endeavour to oppoſe the aſſaults that would ſhortly be made upon them by the Jews, anſwered, "Lord here are two ſwords;" but the bleſſed Jeſus, who only intended to convey an idea of their approaching diſtreſs and temptations, and to arm them againſt the ſurprize, replied (It is enough) you need not trouble yourſelves about any more weapons of this nature for your defence.

Be not terrified and diſconſolate, added the compaſſionate Jeſus, becauſe I have told you that I muſt undergo great ſufferings, and be taken away from you for a time. You have always been taught to believe

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in God, who is the Almighty Preſerver and Governor of all things; and to rely on him for deliverance in every affliction and diſtreſs.

Learn now, in like manner, to believe in me, who have all power committed to me, as a preſerver and head of my church; and truſt in me to accompliſh fully all things that I have promiſed you. If you do this, and perſiſt ſtedfaſtly in the belief of my doctrine, and in the obedience of my commands, nothing in this vale of miſery, not even perſecution, or death itſelf, ſhall be able to hinder you from attaining the happineſs I have propoſed to you. For in heaven, my Father's houſe, there is abundant room to receiveyou: otherwiſe I would not have filled your minds with the hopes and expectation of happineſs. But as there are manſions ſufficient for you, in another ſtate, you may with confidence and aſſurance hope for the full accompliſhment of my promiſes, notwithſtanding all this preſent world may contrive or act againſt you. And ye ought alſo to bear patiently my departure from you, at this time; ſince I only leave you to prepare a place and open the portals of thoſe eternal habitations where I ſhall be ever with you. When I have prepared a place for you in that eternal ſtate, I will again return and take you to myſelf. Nor ſhall you ever more be ſeparated from me, but continue with me to all eternity, in full participation of my eternal glory and happineſs, in the bliſsful regions of the heavenly Canaan. You muſt now ſurely know whither I am going, and the way that leads to theſe happy ſeats of immortality.

But the diſciples, whoſe minds were not yet fully weaned from the expectation of a temporal power and glory, did not underſtand this diſcourſe of their great and beloved Maſter. Accordingly Thomas replied, Lord, we cannot comprehend whither thou art going; and therefore muſt needs be ignorant of the way.

To which the bleſſed Jeſus anſwered, I myſelf, as I have often told you, am the true and only way to life; nor can any man go thither by any other way. If ye ſay ye do not know the father, I tell you, that no man who knoweth me, can be ignorant of my father, of his will, and the manner of pleaſing him: for my father and I are one; ſo that if ye know me, ye muſt know the father alſo. And, indeed, ye do know him, and have been ſufficiently inſtructed in his precepts. Philip,

Philip anſwered, Lord, ſhew us but once the father, and we ſhall be fully ſatisfied.

Jeſus replied, have I been ſo long continually with you, and doſt thou not yet know me, Philip? I tell you I and my father are the ſame; that is, we agree in one in reſpect to every thing I have delivered to you: ſo that to know one, is to be acquainted with both. What then can you mean by deſiring to ſee the father, as if you could ſtill be ignorant of him, after being ſo long acquainted with me? Do you not believe that the father and I are one and the ſame? Whatſoever I ſpeak is the declaration of his will, and whatſoever I do is the operation of his power. Believe me, that the father and I are one. And if ye refuſe to believe my own affirmation, yet, at leaſt, let my works convince you; for they carry in them undeniable evidences of a divine power.

Surely then you have matter ſufficient to comfort and ſupport your ſpirits, under the thoughts of my departure from you. Ye have abundant reaſon to believe, that I have power to perform all the promiſes I have made you; and the deſign of my departure actually to perform them. When I am returned to my father, ye ſhall ſoon receive ſufficient pledges of my care and remembrance of you. Ye ſhall be endued with power, not only to perform the ſame works ye have ſeen me do, as healing diſeaſes, giving ſight to the blind, caſting out devils, and the like, for the conviction of the Jews, but even to do greater things than thoſe: to ſpeak with all kinds of tongues, and to propagate my religion among the Gentiles, even through all the nations of the earth.

And whatſoever ye ſhall aſk of my father, in my name, as being my diſciples, and in order to promote the work of the goſpel, ſhall certainly be granted you. That God may be greatly glorified, by the extraordinary ſucceſs, and ſpreading the religion of his ſon, I ſay, that whatſoever ye ſhall aſk, I will take care, after my return to the father, that it ſhall be granted you. Only ye muſt remember, as the neceſſary condition upon which all depends, that ye be careful above all things to continue ſtedfaſt and immoveable in your obedience to my commands: this is the only true mark you can give of the ſincerity of your love towards me; it is more than your grieving at my departure, or any other

ther external indication of zeal whatſoever.

The father, I ſay, ſhall ſend you another advocate, and comforter, even his Holy Spirit, the author and teacher of truth, who ſhall guide and direct, aſſiſt and comfort you, in all caſes. This ſpirit, the ſenſual and corrupt world cannot receive; having no knowledge of him, nor diſpoſition to be governed by him. But ye know him, and are diſpoſed to entertain him. He is already in you, by his ſecret and inviſible efficacy; and ſhall hereafter appear in you openly, by great and viſible manifeſtations.

Thus, though I muſt depart from you, yet I do by no means leave you comfortleſs. I leave with you a promiſe of the Holy Spirit; and I leave you in expectation alſo of my own return. For though after a very little while, I ſhall appear no more to the world; yet to you I will appear again, for I ſhall live again, and ye alſo ſhall live with me.

When, therefore, I have conquered and triumphed over death, ye ſhall underſtand more fully, and it ſhall appear more viſibly, by great and manifeſt effects, that I act in all things, agreeable to my father's will, and am perfectly inveſted with his power; and that ye, in like manner, have my power and commiſſion communicated to you; ſo that there is a perfect unity and communion between us. Only ye muſt remember, that the one neceſſary condition on which all depends, is, that ye continue ſtedfaſt and immoveable in your faith in me, and in your obedience to my commands. He, and he only, who embraces my doctrine, and obeys and practiſes it, ſhall be judged to be ſincere in his love towards me. And he who loves me, in that manner, ſhall be loved by my Father; and I myſelf alſo will love him, and manifeſt myſelf to him.

Here Judas Thaddeus interrupted his maſter, ſaying, Lord, why wilt thou chooſe to manifeſt thyſelf to us, a few particular perſons; and not to the generality of the world?

Jeſus replied, I have already told you the reaſon for my acting in this manner; becauſe the generality of the world are not diſpoſed to obey my commandments, the neceſſary condition of maintaining communion with me. But ye are diſpoſed to embrace my doctrine, and to obey it; and therefore I manifeſt myſelf to you. And whoever elſe will ſo love me as to keep my commandments, him alſo will I and my Father

ther love, and will maintain communion with him, and all ſpiritual bleſſings ſhall be poured down upon him, and he ſhall be made partaker of happineſs and eternal life.

On the contrary, whoever loves me not, that is, obeys not my commandments, ſhall have no intercourſe or communion with me. Neither will my father love or honour him, or make any manifeſtations of himſelf to him; for as my commandments are not my own, but the father's commandments; therefore, whoever diſhonours me, my father will look upon him as diſhonouring himſelf.

Theſe things have I briefly ſpoken to you now, according to the ſhortneſs of the time I am to continue with you, and to comfort you for the preſent, againſt my departure. But when the comforter, whom I promiſed you, is come, even the Holy Spirit, whom my father ſhall ſend you on my account, he ſhall inſtruct you more fully, recalling to your remembrance, what you have forgotten, explaining what is yet obſcure, and ſupplying what is further neceſſary to be taught you, and to be underſtood by you.

In the mean time I take my leave of you, and my bleſſing I leave with you, not formally, and after the common faſhion of the world, but affectionately and ſincerely; retaining a careful remembrance of you, and with an earneſt deſire and intention of returning again ſpeedily to you. Wherefore, be not overmuch grieved for me and my departure, nor fearful of what may then befal yourſelves. I go away from you, but it is with an intention, as I have already told you, to return to you again. If you loved me with a wiſe and underſtanding affection, ye would rejoice, inſtead of grieving, at my preſent departure; becauſe I am going to my father, the ſupreme Author of all glory and happineſs.

Theſe things I have now told you before they come to paſs, that when ye ſee them happen, your faith in me, and your expectation of the performance of all my promiſes, may be confirmed and ſtrengthened; the time will not allow me to ſay much more to you, at preſent: my end draweth near, the ruler of this world, the prince of the power of darkneſs, is at this inſtant employing all his wicked inſtruments to apprehend and deſtroy me. Not that either the power of the devil, or the malice of man, can at all prevail

vail over me; but becauſe the time of my ſuffering, according to the appointment of divine wiſdom, is arrived, and that I may demonſtrate to the world my love and obedience to my father! I willingly ſubmit myſelf to be put to death by the hands of ſinful and cruel men. Riſe up, let us be going, that I may enter on my ſufferings.

Having thus ſpoken, they finiſhed the paſſover, with ſinging a hymn, and went out to the mount of Olives.

On their arrival at the place which was to be the ſcene of his ſufferings, he deſired them to fortify themſelves by prayer, and forewarned them of the terrible effects his ſufferings would have upon them: they would make them all ſtumble, that very night, agreeable to the prophecy of Zachariah: "I will ſmite the ſhepherd, and the ſheep of the flock ſhall be ſcattered abroad." To ſtrengthen their faith, therefore, he not only mentioned his own reſurrection, but told them they ſhould ſee him in Galilee, after he was riſen from the dead.

On our bleſſed Saviour's mentioning the offence that his diſciples would take at his ſuffering, Peter recollected what had been ſaid to him in particular, before they left the houſe. Grieving, therefore, afreſh, to find his Maſter entertain ſuch thoughts of him, and being now armed with a ſword, the vehemence of his temper urged him to boaſt a ſecond time of his courageous and cloſe attachment to his Maſter. "Though all men, ſaid he, ſhould be offended becauſe of thee, yet will I never be offended." But Jeſus, knowing that human confidence and ſecurity were weak and frail, thought proper to forewarn him again of his danger; and told him, that the cock ſhould not crow, before he had denied him.

Peter, however, ſtill continued to repeat his confidence, I will die with thee, but never deny thee. The diſciples all joined with Peter in profeſſing their fixed reſolution of ſuffering death, rather than they would deny their Maſter; but the event fully confirmed the prediction of our Saviour. From whence we may learn how ignorant men are of their own hearts, and that the ſtrongeſt reſolutions in their own ſtrength avail nothing.

The compaſſionate Redeemer of mankind, not willing to loſe one ſingle moment of the ſhort time of his miniſtry that yet remained, continued

nued to inſtruct his diſciples in the great truths he came into the world to explain: and from the vines, which were growing round him on the mount of Olives, he began his excellent diſcourſe, with the parable of the vine, to the following import.

Hitherto, ſaid the bleſſed Jeſus, the Jewiſh church and nation have been the peculiar care of Providence; as a choice and goodly vine, likely to bring forth much fruit, in the ſpecial care of the huſbandman. But, from henceforth, my church, my diſciples, and the profeſſors of my religion, of what country or nation ſoever they be, ſhall become the people of God, and the peculiar care of Divine Providence. I will be to them as the root and ſtock of a vine, of which they are the branches, and my Father the huſbandman and vine-dreſſer.

As in the management of a choice vine the ſkilful vine-dreſſer cuts off all barren and ſuperfluous branches, that they may not burden, nor exhauſt the tree, and prunes and dreſſes the fruitful branches, that they may grow continually, and bare more fruit: ſo, in the government of my church, all uſeleſs, wicked, and incorrigible members, my Father, by his judgment, cuts off and deſtroys; but thoſe who are ſincerely pious and good, he, by the various and merciful diſpenſations of his providence towards them, tries, purifies, and amends, that they may daily improve, and be more and more abundant in all good works.

Now ye, my apoſtles, are ſuch members as theſe, being purified in heart and mind, and prepared for every good work, by your lively faith in me, and ſincere reſolutions to obey my commands. Continue ſteadfaſtly in this ſtate, and then you may be ſure of deriving all ſpiritual bleſſings from me, as the branches receive ſap and nouriſhment from the vine. But as a branch, without continuing in the vine, cannot bear any fruit, but preſently dries up and periſhes: ſo ye, unleſs ye continue ſtedfaſt in your communion with me, by a lively faith and ſincere obedience, ſo as to receive grace and ſpiritual bleſſings, can never bring forth any good fruit of true holineſs and righteouſneſs, but will fall into vanity, ſuperſtition and wickedneſs, and, at laſt, utterly periſh.

I am, as it were, I ſay, the root and ſtock of the vine, whereof ye are the branches. He that contiues

nues to adhere to me, by conſtant faith in me, ſhall bring forth much fruit unto everlaſting life: even as the branch which continues to grow in a vine, and receive ſap and nouriſhment from it. But he that does not continue his relation to me in this manner, is a falſe, and uſeleſs profeſſor, and ſhall be caſt out from me, and periſh for ever; even as a fruitleſs branch is cut off from the vine, and left to wither and dry, and is, at laſt burnt in the fire.

If ye continue in me, by believing my words, and holding faſt what ye believe; and obeying and practiſing it accordingly, no power, or malice, either of man or of devils, ſhall be able to hurt you, or oppoſe your doctrines. For though I be abſent from you in body, yet I will hear your prayers, and my Father himſelf alſo will hear you: and whatſoever ye ſhall aſk, for the glory of the Almighty, and the propagation of my true religion in the world, ſhall certainly be granted you. But above all things carefully remember to demonſtrate your continuance in me, by abounding in all good works of holineſs, righteouſneſs, and charity. This is the honour which my father deſires and expects from you; even as it is the glory and deſire of a vine-dreſſer, that his vine ſhould bring forth much fruit. And this is the honour that I myſelf expect from you, that ye ſhould prove yourſelves to be really and indeed my diſciples, by imitating my example and obeying my commands. This ye are bound to do, not only in duty, but in gratitude alſo; for as my father hath loved me, ſo have I alſo loved you; and ye in like manner ought to love me again, that you may continue to be loved by me. But the way to expreſs your love towards me, and to continue to be loved by me is to keep my commandments; even as I, by keeping my father's commandments, have expreſſed my love towards him, and continue to be loved by him.

Theſe things have I ſpoken to you before my departure, that the comfort ye have taken in my preſence may be continued in my abſence, and even encreaſed to the coming of the Holy Spirit, as it will be upon this condition, which I have ſo often repeated to you, that you keep my commandments. And the principal of theſe commandments is, that ye love one another; not after the common faſhion of the world, but in ſuch a manner as I have

have loved you; nor can you be ignorant what ſort of love that is, when I tell you that I am now going to lay down my life for you. This is the higheſt inſtance, in which it is poſſible for a man to expreſs his love towards his greateſt friends and benefactors: but this I am now going to do for you, and for all mankind. I do not conſider you as my benefactors, but as my friends, upon this eaſy condition only, that ye keep my commandments. I might, indeed, juſtly call you ſervants, conſidering the infinite diſtance between me and you, and the obligation ye have to obey my commandments; but I have not treated you as ſervants, who are not admitted unto their maſter's counſels, but as friends, revealing unto you the whole will of my father, with all freedom and plainneſs.

I have, I ſay, behaved myſelf to you as to the neareſt friends. Not that you firſt obliged me, or did any acts of kindneſs for me, but I have freely, and of my own good pleaſure, choſen you to be my apoſtles, and the preachers of my goſpel, that you may go and declare the will of God to the world, and bring forth much and laſting fruit in the converſion of men to the knowledge of the truth, and to the profeſſion and practice of true religion and virtue. In the performance of this work, whatſoever ye ſhall aſk of my father in my name, in order to enable you to perform it effectually and with full ſucceſs, ſhall certainly be granted you.

Now all theſe things which I have ſpoken unto you concerning the greatneſs of my love towards you, in chuſing you to be my apoſtles, in revealing unto you the whole will of my Father, and in laying down my life for you; I have urged and inculcated upon you for this reaſon chiefly, as I at firſt told you, that ye may learn, after my example, to love one another. The world, indeed, you muſt expect will hate and perſecute you, upon my account. But this you ought not to be ſurpriſed or terrified at; knowing it is no worſe treatment than I myſelf have met with, before you.

Be not therefore ſurpriſed when ye meet with oppoſition, nor think to find better treatment in the world, than I myſelf have done. Remember what I have already told you, that the diſciple is not above his Maſter; nor is he that is ſent, him. If men had generally and readily embraced my doctrine, you might,

might, indeed, have ſome reaſon to expect that they would willingly have received your's alſo. But ſince I myſelf have ſuffered great indignities and perſecutions from wicked and perverſe, from obſtinate and incorrigible men, only for oppoſing their vices, it is highly reaſonable that you ſhould expect to undergo the like treatment upon the like account. In all which ſufferings you will, moreover, have this further comfortable conſideration to ſupport you, that the juſtice of your own cauſe, and the injuſtice of your perſecutors, will, by that means, moſt evidently appear; ſeeing ye are perſecuted only for profeſſing and preaching in my name the doctrine of true religion and virtue; and they perſecute you only becauſe they know not God, and out of mere malice will not bear to be inſtructed in his commands.

Indeed, had I not appeared to the world with all poſſible demonſtrations of authority and truth, teaching men a moſt holy and undeniable doctrine, ſufficient to reform their manners and amend their lives, and moreover demonſtrating my divine commiſſion by ſuch proofs as ought to ſatisfy and convince the moſt doubting and ſuſpicious minds, they might have had ſome plea and excuſe of ignorance for their unbelief. But now, ſince all reaſonable evidence has been offered them, and proper methods uſed for their converſion and ſalvation, and yet they wilfully and obſtinately reject theſe means of grace, it is plain they have no excuſe for their ſin; but they oppoſe and perſecute you only becauſe they will not forſake their worldly luſts, and out of mere malice will not bear to be inſtructed in the commands of the Almighty.—So that thoſe who oppoſe and perſecute you, as they have before perſecuted me, ſhew plainly that they are haters of God, and of his moſt holy commandments. Which is, as I have already told you, a plain evidence of the juſtice of your cauſe, and of the injuſtice of your perſecutors.

If I had not, I ſay, done ſuch works among them as no man ever did, they might, indeed, have had ſome appearance of excuſe for their ſin. But now, having ſeen abundant proofs of my authority, and undeniable evidence of the truth of my doctrine, and yet wilfully and obſtinately perſiſting to oppoſe it, becauſe inconſiſtent with their luſts,

luſts; it is plain that their diſhonouring me is a diſhonour done to God himſelf, and a direct contempt of his commands: ſo that they are utterly inexcuſable. But it is no wonder, when men have given themſelves wholly up to be governed by worldly affections, paſſions, and vices, they ſhould act contrary to all the reaſon and evidence in the world. For this is but the natural conſequence of obſtinate and habitual wickedneſs; and hereby is only fulfilled in me what holy David long ſince prophetically complained of, that they hated him without a cauſe.

But notwithſtanding all the oppoſition that wicked and incorrigible men will make againſt my doctrine, there will not be wanting powerful promoters of it, who ſhall effectually overcome all oppoſition. For the Comforter, whom I ſaid I will ſend you from heaven, even that ſpirit of truth, which cometh forth, and is ſent from the Father, ſhall, when he cometh, with wonderful efficacy, bear teſtimony to the truth of my doctrine, and cauſe it to be ſpread through the world with incredible ſucceſs. Nay, and ye yourſelves, alſo, though now ſo weak, fearful, and doubting, ſhall then very powerfully bear teſtimony to the truth of all the things, whereof ye having been all along preſent with me, have been eye-witneſſes from the beginning.

Thus have I warned you, beforehand, of the oppoſition and perſecution ye muſt expect to meet with, in the world, that when it cometh, ye may not be ſurpriſed and terrified ſo as to be diſcouraged thereby from perſiſting in the performance of your duty.

You muſt expect, particularly, that the chief prieſts, and rulers of the Jews, men of great hypocriſy and ſuperſtition, zealous for their ceremonies and ritual traditions, but careleſs to know and obey the will of Omnipotence in matters of great and eternal obligation, and invincibly prejudiced againſt the ſpiritual holineſs and purity of my doctrine: theſe, I ſay, you muſt expect will excommunicate you as apoſtates, and caſt you out of all their ſocieties, as the vileſt of malefactors. Nay, to ſuch an abſurd height of malice will their ſuperſtition carry them, that they will even fancy they promote the ſervice of God, and the cauſe of religion, when they moſt barbarouſly murder and deſtroy you. But I have warned you of all this, beforehand, that ye may prepare and for-

tify yourſelves againſt it; and that when it cometh to paſs, ye may remember, I foretold it to you, and your faith in me may thereby be ſtrengthened.

It was needleſs to acquaint you with theſe ſcenes of ſufferings, while I was with you. But now being about to leave you, I think it neceſſary to acquaint you what things are likely to come upon you after my departure, and alſo, at the ſame time, what comfort you may expect to ſupport you under them.

Now I muſt mention the melancholy part, namely, that I am going from you, and that great temptations will befal you in my abſence; this, indeed, ye readily apprehend, and ſuffer your hearts to be overwhelmed with grief at the thoughts of it. But the comfortable part of my diſcourſe, namely, that my departure is only in order to return to him that ſent me, and that I will ſoon after ſend you the Holy Spirit, and the other advantages that will thence reſult to you, are neither conſidered, nor are you ſolicitous about them. Nevertheleſs, if ye will liſten, I will plainly tell you the truth. Ye are ſo far from having reaſon to be dejected at the thoughts of my departure, that on the contrary, it is really profitable and expedient for you that I ſhould now depart; for ſuch is the order and diſpenſation of Providence towords you, and the appointment of my father's eternal and all-wiſe counſel, that before I go and take poſſeſſion of my kingdom, the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, cannot be ſent unto you; but when I am departed from you, and have all power in heaven and earth committed unto me, then I will ſend him unto you. And when he cometh he ſhall abundantly ſupport and comfort you under all your troubles: ſhall powerfully plead your cauſe againſt your adverſaries; and ſhall, with wonderful efficacy, cauſe the doctrine of the goſpel to ſpread and prevail in the world againſt all oppoſition. He ſhall particularly, and in a moſt extraordinary and convincing manner, make the world ſenſible of the greatneſs and heinouſneſs of a ſin of which they were not aware; of the righteouſneſs and juſtice of a diſpenſation they did not underſtand, and of the execution of a moſt remarkable judgment they did not expect.

Firſt, by wonderfully atteſting and confirming the truth of my doctrine, by the gift of tongues, and

and other wonderful ſigns, he ſhall convince the world of the greatneſs and heinouſneſs of their ſins, in diſbelieving and rejecting me.

Secondly, by demonſtrating, that my departure out of the world was not periſhing and dying, but only a returning to my father, in order to be inveſted with all power both in heaven and earth, he ſhall convince the world of the righteouſneſs and juſtice of my cauſe, and of the excellency of that diſpenſation, which I preach and declare to mankind.

Laſtly, by mightily deſtroying the power of the devil and the dominion of ſin, and propagating the doctrine of true religion in the world, with wonderful efficacy and ſucceſs, he ſhall convince men of my power and authority to execute judgment upon mine enemies for the eſtabliſhment of my kingdom upon earth.

There are yet many other things hereafter to be done in relation to the ſettling and eſtabliſhing of my church, which, if it were proper, I would now acquaint you with, but ye are not yet prepared to underſtand and receive them.

Howbeit, when the ſpirit of truth, whom I promiſed you, is come, he ſhall enlarge your underſtandings, remove your prejudices, and inſtruct you in all neceſſary and divine truths, to enable you to go through that great work which I have begun in perſon, and which I will carry on by your miniſtry, for the ſpirit is not to begin any new work, or to found any new doctrine, of himſelf. But as I have taught and will teach you only in my father's name, ſo the ſpirit ſhall inſtruct you only in mine and my father's will, and in things neceſſary to promote and carry on the ſame deſign.

Every thing that he does ſhall be only in order to manifeſt my glory, and eſtabliſh my religion in the world: even as every thing that I have done has been only to manifeſt my father's glory, and reveal his will to mankind. For as all that I have taught is only what I received from my father, ſo all that the ſpirit ſhall teach you is only what he receives from me.

Whatſoever, I ſay, the ſpirit ſhall teach you, is only what he receives from me; for receiving from my father, I call receiving from me, and teaching his will, is teaching mine; ſeeing all things that the father hath are common to me, and all power and dominion by him committed to me.

And

And now be careful to remember what matter for comfort I have given you, and ſupport yourſelves with it under the approaching diſtreſs. It is now, indeed, but a very little while before I ſhall be taken away from you; nevertheleſs let not this cauſe you to deſpair; for, after I am departed, it will be alſo a little while before I appear to you again; foraſmuch as my being taken away from you, is not periſhing, but only returning to my father.

At theſe laſt words of Jeſus, the diſciples were greatly diſturbed and troubled, not underſtanding his true meaning, that in a very ſhort time he ſhould be taken from them by death; and that after having overcome death, by a glorious reſurrection, he would appear to them again, before his aſcenſion into heaven. Not underſtanding this, I ſay, they enquired one of another, what can he mean by telling us, that in a very little time he ſhall be taken out of our ſight; and that in a very little time more we ſhall ſee him again, and this becauſe he goeth to the Father? We cannot underſtand the meaning of all this.

Jeſus, obſerving their perplexity, and knowing that they were deſirous of aſking him, replied, Why are ye thus diſturbed and perplexed about what I told you? Is it a thing ſo very hard to be underſtood, that I ſaid, within a very little time I ſhould be taken away from you, and that within a very little time more I ſhould appear to you again? Verily, verily, I tell you I muſt very ſoon depart out of this world. Then the world, who are your enemies, will rejoice and triumph over you, as if they had deſtroyed me, and wholly ſuppreſſed you; and ye, for your parts, will be overwhelmed with grief and ſorrow. But within a ſhort time I will return to you again; and then your ſorrow ſhall be turned into exceeding great joy.

Even as a woman when ſhe is in labour, hath great pain and ſorrow, for the preſent, but as ſoon as ſhe is delivered, forgets all her ſufferings, and rejoices at the birth of her ſon; ſo ye, while ye are under the immediate apprehenſion of my departure from you, and during that time of diſtreſs and temptation, which ſhall befal you in my abſence, will be full of ſorrow and anxiety of mind: but when I return to you again, then ye ſhall rejoice with joy unſpeakable and full of glory, and no power or malice of man ſhall ever be

be able to take from you any more the cauſe or continuance of it.

But though I ſhall return to you again, and your hearts will thereupon be filled with inexpreſſible joy, and which never ſhall be taken from you any more; yet there will be no neceſſity that I ſhould then continue long with you in perſon, to inſtruct you upon every occaſion, as I have now done with my own mouth. For beſides that the Holy Spirit will be ſent to inſtruct you in all things neceſſary, my Father himſelf alſo will hear your petitions, and be ready to grant you whatſoever you ſhall deſire of him in my name, and as being my diſciples.

Hitherto ye have aſked nothing of God in my name; but from henceforth put up your petitions in my name: and whatſoever ye ſhall ſo aſk for the glory of God, and in order to enable you to go through the work of your miniſtry ſucceſsfully, ſhall certainly be granted you: that your joy, which will begin at my appearing to you again after my death, may be completed by the wonderful ſucceſs and efficacy of your own miniſtry.

Theſe things I have told you, at preſent, imperfect and obſcurely, according as your capacities are able to bear them. But the time is coming, when I will ſpeak to you with more openneſs, freedom, and plainneſs, the whole will of my father concerning the nature and eſtabliſhment of my kingdom, and what things and in what manner ye ought to pray unto him for.

At that time ye ſhall with firm aſſurance pray to my father in my name for what ye want. And I need not tell you, that I will intercede with the father on your behalf; for beſides the love he has bore for me, and the power and authority my prayers have with him, he has moreover of himſelf a great love for you, and a ready diſpoſition to grant your prayers, becauſe ye are become grateful and acceptable to him, by your love towards me, which ye have ſhewn in embracing willingly that holy doctrine which I have revealed to you from him.

To conclude; the ſum of what I have told you is briefly and plainly this. I came down from heaven from God my father, and have lived upon earth in the ſtate of frail and mortal man, that I might reveal to mankind the will of my heavenly father, and the way to attain eternal life and happineſs; and now having finiſhed this great work,

I am about to leave this world, and return again to my father, from whence I at firſt came.

Theſe laſt words of Jeſus, being more plain and expreſs than any he had before ſpoken, ſo that now the diſciples clearly perceived that the departure he had ſo often mentioned was no other than his actual going out of this world, they replied, Now, Lord, you ſpeak plainly, and without any figure; ſo that we apprehend fully what you mean. And now that our curioſity is ſatisfied, you have likewiſe greatly confirmed our faith; having given us a certain token whereby we are aſſured that you know all things, even the hearts and ſecret thoughts of men; ſince you have anſwered us a queſtion which gave us great perplexity, and were deſirous to aſk your opinion, but were afraid: but now we are convinced that you are indued with true divine power, and did, indeed, come forth from God. To which Jeſus anſwered, And do you now at length firmly believe in me? Are you reſolved to continue ſtedfaſt in this faith? Do you think yourſelves able to perſevere immovably in the profeſſion of it? Be not confident of your own ſtrength; but pray that ye may be delivered from temptation in the time of diſtreſs, ſuch as will come upon you much ſooner than ye expect. For I tell you, that ye will all of ye within a few hours utterly forſake me, and fly in hopes to ſecure yourſelves, leaving me alone. And yet I ſhould not ſay alone, ſince my father is with me, who is more than all. I have, therefore, acquainted you with theſe things before-hand, that your minds may be furniſhed with ſufficient matter of comfort and ſtrength to bear up under all temptations, from the conſideration of my having foretold both what diſtreſs will befal you, and how ye ſhall terminate your victory over all your enemies. You muſt, indeed, expect to meet with much affliction, but let not this diſcourage you. I have ſubdued the world; follow my examples, and partake of my reward.

Having thus finiſhed his diſcourſe, "Jeſus lift up his eyes to heaven, and prayed, ſaying," Oh Almighty Father, now the time of my ſuffering, for which I was ſent into the world, is arrived; I intreat thee to ſupport me under it, and make me triumph over death by a glorious reſurrection, and aſcenſion into heaven; that by this means the glo-

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ry may redound to thee, and cauſe thy will to be believed and obeyed through all the world, to ſalvation of mankind; according to the full intent of that office and power with which thou didſt originally inveſt me. In order to the bringing about this great deſign of ſalvation, I have declared thy will to mankind. I have publiſhed thy precepts, and diſcharged the great miſſion intruſted to me; I have preached thy doctrine of repentance to ſalvation, and have finiſhed the work which thou ſenteſt me to do, to the glory of thy name upon earth; and now, to complete the great deſign, do thou, O Almighty Father, likewiſe glorify me with thine own-ſelf. Support me under my ſufferings: let me prevail and triumph over death, by a glorious reſurrection, and exalt me again to the ſame glory in heaven, which I had with thee before the creation of the univerſe. I have manifeſted thy will to the diſciples, the men that thou gaveſt me out of the world. To thoſe perſons thou didſt in thine infinite wiſdom appoint, that thy truth ſhould be made known. Therefore to them I have revealed the myſteries of thy kingdom, the precepts of thy goſpel, and the doctrine of thy ſalvation. And this doctrine they have willingly embraced, ſtedfaſtly adhered to, and ſincerely obeyed: as they are fully ſatisfied and convinced, that what I taught them as from thee was really a divine doctrine taught by thine immediate appointment and command; and that I did not preach any human invention or inſtitution of men, but was really ſent by the divine authority and commiſſion.

For theſe perſons, therefore, I now pray, that as thou haſt begun the work of their ſalvation, by my preaching and revealing to them thy will, while I have been preſent with them here upon earth, ſo alſo that thou wouldeſt preſerve them when I am departed from this world, and complete the work of their ſalvation by my reſurrection and aſcenſion into heaven, after my death. I do not pray for the unbelieving impenitent world, but for thoſe who have embraced that moſt holy doctrine, which thou haſt taught them through me by my preaching; for thoſe who have glorified, and will glorify my name, by their miniſtry, and who conſequently are to be eſteemed as thine own, in common with me. I am now about to leave the world, in order to return to thee;

thee; but theſe my diſciples, who continue after me, I recommend to thy divine protection, when I am gone: endue them with powers to perſevere in preaching and practiſing the truth, and to deliver the ſame holy doctrines which I have given to them, that ſo they may remain inſeparable united to me, as I am to thee. So long as I have been with them in the world, I have watched over them, and kept them from falling away, both by example, preaching, and continual admonition, according to the power and authority which thou didſt commit to me; nor has one of my apoſtles miſcarried under my care, except that perfidious traitor, who, as the ſcripture foretold, has ungratefully conſpired with my enemies to deſtroy me, and will periſh according to his deſerts. While I have continued with my diſciples, I have watched over them and preſerved them under mine own eye; but now, I am going to leave the world, I beſeech thee to keep and aſſiſt them by thy good ſpirit; and let the expectation of their continuing under thy ſpecial care and protection, be their comfort and ſupport in my abſence.

The world, indeed, will perſecute and hate them, on this account, as my doctrine is repugnant to the luſt and affections, the paſſions, deſigns, and inclinations of worldly men; it muſt neceſſarily be that the vicious and incorrigible world will oppoſe and perſecute them, as it has before perſecuted me. I beſeech thee, therefore, take them under thy particular care, to ſupport them againſt the violence and oppreſſion of an evil world. I do not deſire that thou ſhouldeſt take them out of the world, but preſerve them in it to be inſtruments of thy word, thy glory, and to be teachers of thy truth; nor ſuffer them to be either deſtroyed by the malice and violence, or corrupted by the evil cuſtom and opinions, of a perverſe and wicked generation.

They are of a temper and ſpirit very different from the current affection and common diſpoſitions of the world, according to the example of purity which I have ſet before them. Do thou preſerve and increaſe in them that moderation and candour of mind. cauſe them to be thoroughly affected and impreſſed with that true doctrine ſo frequently recommended to them from my mouth, ſo as to expreſs it viſibly in their lives and practice, and

and to promote it zealouſly in their preaching, that they may, both by word and good example, become worthy and ſucceſsful miniſters of my goſpel.

For as thou haſt ſent me into the world to reveal thy will to mankind, ſo ſend I theſe my apoſtles to continue preaching the ſame doctrine begun by me. And the principal deſign of my exemplary life, conſtant teaching, and now voluntarily offering myſelf to death; for it is, to ſanctify and enable them to preach with ſucceſs and efficacy for the ſalvation of men. Neither pray I for theſe my apoſtles only, but for all others, who ſhall, by their preaching and practice, promote thy true religion; and being converted from the world, may, by their ſincere endeavours, go on to reform others, convincing the world of the excellency of their religion, and conſequently enforcing men to acknowledge the truth and divine authority thereof. For promoting which great end, I have communicated to my apoſtles the ſame power and authority of doing mighty works for the confirmation of their doctrine, and the evidence of thy truth, as thou didſt communicate to me; that ſo I working in them, as thou haſt done in me, and thus confirming with great efficacy and demonſtration of the ſpirit, they may eſtabliſh the ſame doctrine which I publiſhed in perſon, the world may, by this evidence, be convinced that I was really ſent by thee, and that my diſciples act by the ſame divine commiſſion.

Holy and Almighty Father, all thoſe whom thou haſt thus given me, who have heartily embraced my doctrine, and ſincerely obeyed it, I deſire that thou wouldeſt make them partakers of the ſame happineſs with myſelf, and exalt them to behold the incomprehenſible glory wherewith thou didſt originally inveſt me, in thy eternal love, before the foundation of the world. The generality of mortals, O righteous father! have not known thee, nor been willing to embrace, and obey the revelation of thy will. But I have known thy will, and have made it known to my diſciples, men of ſimplicity and honeſty; and they have embraced and obeyed it. And I will continually make it known to them, more and more, that they may grow up and improve in faith, in holineſs, and in all good works, ſo as finally to arrive, and cauſe others to arrive, at that eternal happineſs,

pineſs, which is the effect of thy infinite love towards me, and through me towards them.

This pious and benevolent prayer being ended, Jeſus and his diſciples came down from the mount of Olives into a field below, called Gethſemane, through which the brook Cedron ran, and in it, on the other ſide of the brook, was a garden, called the garden of Gethſemane. Here he deſired his diſciples to ſit down, till he ſhould retire to pray, taking with him, Peter, James and John, thoſe three ſelect diſciples, whom he had bechoſen to be witneſſes of his tranſfiguration, and now to be eye-witneſſes of his paſſion, leaving the other diſciples at the garden-door, to watch the approach of Judas and his band.

The ſufferings he was on the point of undergoing were ſo great, that the very proſpect of them terrified him, and made him expreſs himſelf in this doleful exclamation, "My ſoul is exceeding ſorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here, and watch." On this great occaſion he ſuſtained thoſe grievous ſorrows in his ſoul, by which, as well as by dying on the croſs, he became a ſin-offering, and accompliſhed the redemption of mankind.

He now withdrew from them about a ſtone's caſt, and his human nature being overburdened beyond meaſure, he found it neceſſary to retire and pray, that if it was poſſible, or conſiſtent with the ſalvation of the world, he might be delivered from the ſufferings which were then lying on him. It was not the fear of dying on the croſs, which made him ſpeak or pray in ſuch a manner. To ſuppoſe this would infinitely degrade his character. Make his ſufferings as terrible as poſſible, clothe them with all the aggravating circumſtances of diſtreſs; yet the bleſſed Jeſus, whoſe human nature was ſtrengthened by being connected with the divine, could not ſhrink at the proſpect of ſufferings, or betray a weakneſs which many of his followers, who, though mere men, were ſtrangers to; having encountered more terrible deaths without the leaſt emotions. He addreſſes his divine Father with a ſigh of fervent wiſhes that the cup might, if poſſible, be removed from him: In the Greek it is, "O that thou wouldeſt remove this cup from me!" And having firſt kneeled and prayed, he fell proſtrate on his face, accompanying his addreſs with due expreſſions of reſignation, adding, immediately,

diately, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt."

Having prayed, he returned to his diſciples, and finding them aſleep, he ſaid to Peter, "Simon, ſleepeſt thou? couldeſt thou not watch one hour?" Thou, who ſo lately didſt boaſt of thy courage and conſtancy in my ſervice, canſt thou ſo ſoon forget thy maſter?

But in his greateſt diſtreſs he never loſt ſight of that kind concern he had for his diſciples. "Watch ye, (ſays he) and pray, leſt ye enter into temptation." Neither was he, on thoſe extraordinary occaſions, in the leaſt chagrined with the offences which they had committed through frailty and human weakneſs; on the contrary, was always willing to make excuſes for them; alledging, in their defence, "that the ſpirit (truly) was ready, but the fleſh was weak." It ſeems, from theſe particulars, that he ſpent ſome conſiderable time in his addreſſes; becauſe the diſciples fell aſleep, in his abſence, and he himſelf retired again to pray; for the ſorrows of our Lord continuing to increaſe upon him, affected him to ſuch a degree, that he retired a ſecond time, and prayed to the ſame purpoſe, ſaying, "O my Father, if this cup may not paſs away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done: (after which he returned again to them, and found them aſleep) for their eyes were heavy."

He returned thus frequently to his diſciples, that they, by reading his diſtreſs in his countenance and geſture, might be witneſſes of his paſſion, which proves that his pains were beyond deſcription intenſe, and complicated: for he went away the third time to pray, and notwithſtanding an angel was ſent from heaven to comfort and ſtrengthen him, yet they overwhelmed him, and threw him into an agony: upon which he ſtill continued to pray more earneſtly.

But the ſenſe of his ſufferings ſtill increaſing, they ſtrained his whole body to ſo violent a degree, that his blood was preſſed through the pores of his ſkin, which they pervaded, together with his ſweat, and fell down in large drops on the ground. "And he left them and went away again. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, ſtrengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earneſtly: and his ſweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Thus did he ſuffer unſpeakable ſorrows

rows in his ſoul, as long as the divine wiſdom thought proper.

At length he obtained relief, being heard on account of his perfect and entire ſubmiſſion to the will of his heavenly father. "And when he aroſe up from prayer, and was come to his diſciples, he found them ſleeping for ſorrow." This circumſtance ſhews how much the diſciples were affected with their Maſter's ſufferings. The ſenſations of grief which they felt on ſeeing his unſpeakable diſtreſs ſo overpowered them, that they ſunk into ſleep.

Our bleſſed Saviour, for the laſt time, came to his diſciples, and ſeeing them aſleep, he ſaid, "Sleep on now, and take your reſt; behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of ſinners. Riſe, let us be going; behold, he is at hand, that doth betray me." *Matt.* xxvi. 45, 46. The event will ſoon be over, which cauſes your ſorrow: I am betrayed, and ready to be delivered up to death.

CHAP. XXXIV.

The bleſſed Redeemer is taken by a Band of Soldiers, at the Information of the Traitor Judas. Heals a Wound given the high Prieſt's Servant, by Simon Peter.

JUDAS, who had often reſorted to the garden of Gethſemane, with the diſciples of our Lord, knowing the ſpot, and the uſual time of his Maſter's repairing thither, informed the chief prieſts and elders that the proper time for apprehending Jeſus was now come. They therefore ſent a band of ſoldiers with him, and ſervants carrying lanterns and torches, to ſhew them the way; becauſe, though it was always full moon at the paſſover, the ſky might be dark with clouds, and the place whither they were going was ſhaded with trees. At the ſame time a deputation of their number accompanied the band, to ſee that every one did his duty.

Judas having thus received a band of men and officers from the chief prieſts and Phariſees, they came thither with lanterns and torches, and weapons: for they were exceeding anxious to ſecure and get him into their hands: and the ſoldiers, having, perhaps, never ſeen Jeſus before, found it neceſſary that Judas ſhould diſtinguiſh him, and point him out to them by ſome particular ſign.

St. Luke ſeems to ſay, that Judas went before them, at a little diſtance, to prepare them for the readier

readier execution of their office, by kiſſing his Maſter, the token they had agreed upon, that they might not miſtake him and ſeize a wrong perſon. "And he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jeſus to kiſs him." Nor can the account which St. John has given us be underſtood on any other ſuppoſition. He ſays, that after Judas was come up with the ſoldiers, Jeſus went out of the garden, and aſked them, who it was they were ſeeking? To which they replied, Jeſus of Nazareth. It therefore follows, that they were at a loſs to know him, which they could not have been, had they ſeen Judas kiſs him: the kiſs, therefore, muſt have been given in the garden, before the band came up, nor is their agreement about the ſign inconſiſtent with this ſuppoſition; becauſe that confuſion which commonly attends the commiſſion of an evil action, might prevent Judas from giving the ſign at the proper ſeaſon.

He went before the ſoldiers, on pretence that he would lead them to the place, and ſhew them the man by kiſſing him: however to conceal his villainy from his Maſter and the diſciples, he walked haſtily, and without waiting for the band, went up directly, and ſaluted him; feigning, perhaps, to apprize him of his danger. But Jeſus did not fail to convince him that he knew the meaning and intent of his ſalution, ſaying, "betrayeſt thou the ſon of man, with a kiſs? Judas certainly concealed his treachery ſo well, that Peter did ſuſpect him, as it is probable he would have ſtruck at him, rather then at Malchus, the high prieſt's ſervant.

The appointed time of our Lord's ſufferings being now come, he did not, as formerly, avoid his enemies; but on the contrary, on their telling him they ſought Jeſus of Nazareth, he replied, I am he; thereby inſinuating to them, that he was willing to put himſelf into their hands. At the ſame time, to ſhew them that they could not apprehend him without his own conſent, he in an extraordinary manner exerted his divine power; he made the whole band fall back, and threw them to the ground. "Jeſus, therefore, knowing all things that ſhould come upon him, went forth, and ſaid unto them, whom ſeek ye? They anſwered him, Jeſus Nazareth. Jeſus ſaid unto them, I am he. And Judas alſo who betrayed him, ſtood

with them. As ſoon then as he had ſaid unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground." But the ſoldiers and the Jews, imagining, perhaps, that they had been thrown down by ſome demon or evil ſpirit with whom the Jews ſaid he was in confederacy, advanced towards him a ſecond time. "Then aſked he them, again, whom ſeek ye? and they ſaid, Jeſus of Nazareth. Jeſus anſwered, I have told you that I am he, (expreſſing again his willingneſs to fall into their hands) If, therefore, ye ſeek me let theſe go their way." If your buſineſs be with me alone, ſuffer my diſciples to paſs: for the party had ſurrounded them alſo. He ſeems to have made this requeſt to the ſoldiers, that the ſaying might be fulfilled, which he ſpake, "of them which thou gaveſt me have I loſt none." For as God always proportions the trials of his people to their ſtrength; ſo here he took care that the diſciples ſhould eſcape the ſtorm, which none but himſelf could ſuſtain.

At length, ſome of the ſoldiers, more daring than the reſt, rudely caught Jeſus, and bound him: upon which Peter drew his ſword, and ſmote off the ear of the prieſt's ſervant, who probably was ſhewing greater forwardneſs than the reſt, in this buſineſs. "Then Simon Peter, having a ſword, drew it, and ſmote the high prieſt's ſervant, ond cut off his right ear; the ſervant's name was Malchus." The enraged diſciple was on the point of ſingly attacking the whole band, when Jeſus ordered him to ſheath the ſword; telling him, that his unſeaſonable and imprudent defence might prove the occaſion of his deſtruction. "Then ſaid Jeſus unto him, Put up again thy ſword into his place: for all they that take the ſword ſhall periſh with the ſword." *Matt.* xxvi. 52. He told him, likewiſe, that it implied both a diſtruſt of God, who can always employ a variety of means for the ſafety of his people, and alſo his ignorance in the ſcriptures. "Thinkeſt thou, ſaid he, that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he ſhall preſently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then ſhall the ſcripture be fulfilled that thus it muſt be?" *Matt.* xxvi. 53.

The word legion was a Roman military term, being the name which they gave to a body of five or ſix thouſand men; wherefore in regard that the band, which now ſurrounded them, was a Roman cohort, our Lord

Lord might make uſe of this term, by way of contraſt, to ſhew what an inconſiderable thing the cohort was, in compariſon of the force he could ſummon to his aſſiſtance; more than twelve legions, not of ſoldiers, but of angels. He yet was tenderly inclined to prevent any bad conſequence which might have flowed from Peter's raſhneſs, by healing the ſervant, and adding in his rebuke to him, a declaration of his willingneſs to ſuffer. "The cup which my Father has given me, ſhall I not drink it?"

The circumſtance of his healing the ear of Malchus, by touching it, evidently implies, that no wound, or diſtemper was incurable in the hand of Jeſus: neither was any injury ſo great that he could not forgive. It ſeems ſomewhat ſurpriſing that this evident miracle did not make an impreſſion upon the chief prieſts, eſpecially as our Lord put them in mind, at the ſame time, of his other miracles; for having firſt ſaid, "Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him." He added, "Be ye come out, as againſt a thief, with ſwords, and ſtaves? When I was daily with you in the temple, ye ſtretched forth no hands againſt me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkneſs." *Luke* xxii. 51, &c. They had kept at a diſtance, during the attack, but drew near, when they underſtood that Jeſus was in their power? for they were proof againſt all conviction, being obſtinately bent on putting him to death. And the diſciples, when they ſaw their Maſter in the hands of his enemies, forſook him and fled, according to his prediction; notwithſtanding they might have followed him without any danger, as the prieſts had no deſign againſt them. "Then all the diſciples forſook him, and fled. Then the band the captain and officers took Jeſus and bound him." But it was not the cord which held him; his immenſe charity was by far a ſtronger bond. He could have broken thoſe weak ties, and exerted his divinity in a more wonderful manner; he could have ſtricken them all dead, with as much eaſe as he had before thrown them on the ground; but he patiently ſubmitted to this, as to every other indignity which they pleaſed to offer him; ſo meek was he under the greateſt injuries. Having thus ſecured him, they led him away. "And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth caſt about his naked body; and

and the young man laid hold of him, and he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked." This, perhaps, was the proprietor of the garden; who being awakened with the noiſe, came out with the linen cloth, in which he had been lying, caſt round his naked body; and having a reſpect for Jeſus, followed him, forgetitng the dreſs he was in.

They firſt led him to Annas, father-in-law to Caiaphas, who was high-prieſt that year. Annas having himſelf diſcharged the office of high-prieſt, was conſequently a perſon of diſtinguiſhed character, which, together with his relation to the high-prieſt, made him worthy of the reſpect they now paid him. But he refuſed ſingly to meddle in the affair; they therefore carried Jeſus to Caiaphas himſelf, at whoſe palace the chief prieſts, elders, and ſcribes, were aſſembled, having ſtaid there all night to ſee the iſſue of their ſtratagem. This Caiaphas was he that adviſed the council to put Jeſus to death, even admitting he was innocent for the ſafety of the whole Jewiſh nation. He ſeems to have enjoyed the ſacerdotal divinity during the whole courſe of Pilate's government in Judea: for he was advanced by Valerius Gracchus, Pilate's predeceſſor, and was diveſted of it by Vitellius, governor of Syria, after he had depoſed Pilate from his procuratorſhip.

CHAP. XXXV.

Fulfilment of our Lord's prediction, concerning Peter.

THE apprehending of Jeſus could not but ſtrike his diſciples with horror and amazement; though he had forewarned them of that event, ſuch was their conſternation, that they fled different ways: ſome of them, however, recovering out of the panic that had ſeized them, followed the band at a diſtance, to ſee what the iſſue would be. Of this number was Peter and another diſciple, whom John has mentioned without giving his name, and who, therefore, is ſuppoſed to have been John himſelf.

This diſciple being acquainted at the high prieſt's, got admittance for himſelf, firſt, and ſoon after for Peter, who had come with him. "And Simon Peter followed Jeſus, and ſo did another diſciple. That diſciple was known to the high-prieſt, and went in with Jeſus to the palace of the high-prieſt. But Petes ſtood at the door without. Then went out that other diſciple, and ſpake

ſpake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. And when they had kindled a fire in the midſt of the hall, and were ſat down together, Peter ſat down among them. The maid-ſervant who kept the door, concluding Peter to be a diſciple alſo, followed after him to the fire, and looking earneſtly at him, charged him with the ſuppoſed crime. "Then ſaith the damſel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou alſo one of this man's diſciples?" This blunt attack threw Peter into ſuch confuſion, that he flatly denied his having any connection with Jeſus, replying, I am not, and adding, "I know not, neither underſtand I what thou ſayeſt." As if he had ſaid, I do not underſtand any reaſon for your aſking me ſuch a queſtion. Thus the very apoſtle who had before acknowledged his Maſter to be the Meſſiah, the Son of the living God, who was honoured with the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and had ſo confidently boaſted of fortitude, and firm attachment to him in the greateſt dangers, proved an arrant deſerter of his cauſe upon trial. His ſhameful fears were altogether inexcuſable, as the enemy who attacked him was one of the weaker ſex, and the terror of the charge was in a great meaſure taken off, by the inſinuation made in it that John was likewiſe known to be Chriſt's diſciple: for as he was known at the high-prieſt's, he was conſequently known in that character. "Art thou not alſo one of this man's diſciples?" Art thou not one of them, as well as he who is ſitting with you? Nothing can account for the conduct of Peter, but the confuſion and panic which had ſeized him, on this occaſion. As his inward perturbation muſt have appeared in his countenance and geſture, he did not chuſe to ſtay long with the ſervants at the fire. He went out, therefore, into the porch, where he was a little concealed. "And he went out into the porch, and the cock crew (namely, for the firſt time) And another maid ſaw him, and began to ſay to them that ſtood by, this is one of them; and he again denied it, with an oath, I know not the man;" (adding perjury to a lye).

After Peter had been thus attacked without doors, he thought proper to return and mix with the crowd at the fire. "And Simon Peter ſtood and warmed himſelf." From this circumſtance we may conclude, that the enſuing was the third

denial; and that Peter left the porch where the ſecond denial happened, and was come again into the hall. "Here one of the ſervants of the high prieſt (being his kinſman whoſe ear Peter cut off) ſaith, did not I ſee thee in the garden with him? Peter then denied again, and immediately the cock crew." The words of Malchus's kinſman bringing to Peter's remembrance what he had done to that ſlave, threw him into ſuch a panic, that when thoſe who ſtood by repeated the charge, he impudently denied it: "He even began to curſe and to ſwear, ſaying, I know not this man of whom ye ſpeak." For when they heard Peter deny the charge, they ſupported it by an argument drawn from the accent with which he pronounced his anſwer. Surely thou art one of them; for thou art a Galilean, and thy ſpeech agreeth thereto: ſo that being preſſed on all ſides, to give his lie the better colour, he prophaned the name of God, by imprecating the bittereſt curſes on himſelf, if he was telling a falſehood. Perhaps, he hoped, by theſe acts of impiety to convince them effectually that he was not the diſciple of the holy Jeſus.

Thus the Apoſtle denied his maſter three diſtinct times, with oaths and aſſeverations, totally forgetting the vehement proteſtations he had made, a few hours before, that he would never deny him. He was permitted to fall in this manner, to teach us two leſſons; firſt, that the ſtrongeſt reſolutions formed in our own ſtrength cannot withſtand the torrent of temptation; ſecondly, that the true diſciples of Chriſt, though they fall, ſhall be brought to a conviction of their ſin; for he no ſooner denied his maſter, the third time, then the cock crew, and awakened in him the firſt conviction of his ſin. "And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter; and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had ſaid unto him, Before the cock crow, thou ſhalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly." St. *Luke* is the only evangeliſt who has preſerved this beautiful circumſtance of Chriſt's turning and looking on Peter.

The members of the council who ſat on Jeſus were placed at the upper end of the hall: in the other were the ſervants with Peter at the fire; ſo that Jeſus being probably placed on ſome eminence, that his judges, who were numerous, might ſee and hear him, could eaſily look over towards

wards Peter, and obſerve him denying him, and in paſſionate terms loud enough to be heard, perhaps, over all the place. The look pierced him, and with the crowing of the cock brought his maſter's prediction freſh into his mind. He was ſtung with deep remorſe; and being unable to contain himſelf, he covered his face with his garment, to conceal the confuſion he was in, and going out into the porch, wept very bitterly. All this paſſed while the prieſts examined Jeſus with many taunts and revilings; and while the moſt zealous of Chriſt's diſciples was denying him with oaths and imprecations, the others inſulted him in the moſt inhuman manner. Thus a complication of injuries, inſults and indignities, were at one time heaped upon the bleſſed Redeemer, the meek and mild Jeſus, in order to fulfil the prophecies concerning him, and teach his followers a leſſon of humility.

CHAP. XXXVI.

The Saviour of the world is arraigned at the Bar of the Sanhedrim, and tried by the Jewiſh council.

WHEN the band of ſoldiers arrived at the high prieſt's with Jeſus, they found there all the chief prieſts, the ſcribes, and the elders aſſembled, "And as ſoon as it was day, the elders of the people, and the chief prieſts, and the ſcribes came together, and led him into their council. And the high prieſt aſked Jeſus of his diſciples, and his doctrine." He enquired of him what his diſciples were; for what end he had gathered them, whether it was to make himſelf a king, and what the doctrine was which he taught them? In theſe queſtions there was a great deal of art; for as the crime laid to our Saviour's charge was, that he had ſet up for the Meſſiah, and deluded the people, they expected he would claim that dignity in his preſence, and ſo would, on his own confeſſion, have condemned him, without any farther progreſs. This was unfair, as it was artful and enſnaring. To oblige a priſoner on his trial to confeſs what might take away his life, was a very inequitable method of proceeding; and Jeſus expreſſed his opinion thereof with very good reaſon, and complained of it, bidding them prove what they had laid to his charge, by witneſſes. "Jeſus anſwered him, I ſpake openly to the world, I ever taught in the ſynagogues, and in the temple, whither the

the Jews always reſort, and in ſecret have I ſaid nothing. Why aſketh thou me? aſk them which heard me, what I have ſaid unto them; behold they know what I ſaid."

It was greatly to the honour of our bleſſed Redeemer, that all his actions were done in public, under the eye even of his enemies; becauſe, had he been carrying on any impoſture, the lovers of goodneſs and truth had thus abundant opportunities of detecting him with propriety: he, therefore, in his defence, appealed to that part of his character, but his anſwer was conſtrued diſreſpectful; for, "when he had thus ſpoken, one of the officers, which ſtood by, ſtruck Jeſus with the palm of his hand, ſaying, anſwered thou the high prieſt ſo?" To which he meekly replied, with the greateſt ſerenity, "If I have ſpoken evil, bear witneſs of the evil: but if well, why ſmiteſt thou me?" Shew me, prove before this court, wherein my crime conſiſts, or record it in the evidence on the face of my trial; which if you cannot, how can you anſwer this inhuman treatment to a defenceleſs priſoner, ſtanding on his trial before the world, and in open court?

Thus Jeſus became an example of his own precept. "Whoſever ſhall ſmite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other alſo." *Matt.* v. 29. bearing the greateſt injuries with a patience that could not be provoked.

When the council found that Jeſus declined anſwering the queſtions, whereby they expected to have drawn from him an acknowledgment of his being the Meſſiah, they proceeded to examine many witneſſes to prove his having aſſumed that character: as they conſidered ſuch a pretenſion as blaſphemy in his mouth, who being only a man, according to their opinion, could not, without the higheſt affront to the divine majeſty, pretend to the title of the Son of God, as it belongeth only to the Meſſiah.

But in this examination they acted like intereſted and enraged perſecutors, rather than impartial judges, forming their queſtions in the moſt artful manner, in order, if poſſible, to draw expreſſions from them which they might pervert into ſuſpicions of guilt, as ſome foundation for condemning Jeſus, who had ſo long and faithfully laboured for their ſalvation.

Their witneſſes however diſappointed them, ſome of them diſagreeing

greeing in their ſtory, and others, mentioning things of no manner of importance. At laſt, two perſons agreed in their diſpoſitions, namely, in hearing him ſay, that he was able to deſtroy the temple of God, and to raiſe it in three days. But this teſtimony was abſolutely falſe; for our great Redeemer never ſaid he could deſtroy and build the temple of Jeruſalem, in three days, as they affirmed.

It is true, that after baniſhing the traders from the temple, when the Jews deſired to know by what authority he undertook to make ſuch a reformation, he referred them to the miracle of his reſurrection; bidding them "deſtroy this temple (pointing probably to his body) and in three days he would raiſe it up." The witneſſes, therefore, either through malice or ignorance, perverted his anſwer into an affirmation, that he was able to deſtroy, and build the magnificent temple of Jeruſalem, in three days: and the judges conſidered this aſſertion as blaſphemy, becauſe it could be only done by the divine power.

Our Saviour made no reply to the evidences that were produced againſt him, which greatly provoked the high prieſt, who ſuppoſing that he intended by his ſilence to put an affront on the council, roſe from his ſeat, and with great perturbation, demanded the reaſon for ſo remarkable a conduct. "Anſwereſt thou nothing? (ſaid he) what is it which theſe witneſs againſt thee? (And ſome of the council added) Art thou the Chriſt?" To which our bleſſed Saviour anſwered, if I ſhould tell you plainly you would not believe me; and if I ſhould demonſtrate it to you by the moſt evident and undeniable arguments, ye would neither be convinced, nor let me go.

The high prieſt, finding all his attempts to trapan our Saviour in vain, ſaid to him, I adjure you ſolemnly by the dreadful and tremendous name of God in whoſe preſence you ſtand, that you tell us plainly and truly, whether thou art the Meſſiah, the Son of God.

The conſequence attending a confeſſion of the truth did not intimidate the bleſſed Jeſus; for, being adjured by the chief magiſtrate, he immediately confeſſed the charge, adding, ye ſhall ſhortly ſee a convincing evidence of this truth, in that wonderful and unparalleled deſtruction which I will ſend upon the Jewiſh nation; in the quick and

powerful progreſs, which the goſpel ſhall make over the earth; and, finally, in my glorious appearance in the clouds of heaven, at the laſt day, the ſign you have ſo often demanded, in confirmation of my miſſion.

Upon our bleſſed Saviour's making this anſwer, a number of them cried out, at once, "Art thou the Son of God? (To which our great Redeemer replied) Ye ſay that I am:" a manner of ſpeaking among the Jews, which expreſſed a plain and ſtrong affirmation of the thing expreſſed.

When the high prieſt heard this ſecond aſſertion, he rent his cloths with great indignation, and ſaid unto the council, why need we trouble ourſelves to ſeek for any more witneſſes? Ye yourſelves, nay this whole aſſembly, are witneſſes, that he hath ſpoken manifeſt and notorious blaſphemy; What think ye? To which they all replied, that, for aſſuming to himſelf the character of the Meſſiah, he deſerved to be put to death.

Then began the ſervants and common people to fall upon him as a man already condemned; ſpitting upon him, buffeting him, and offering him all manner of rudeneſs and indignities. They blindfolded him; and ſome of the council, in order to ridicule him for having pretended to be the great prophet, bid him exerciſe his prophetical gift, in declaring who had ſmote him.

Such was the treatment of the Son of God, the Saviour of ſinners, which, though unworthy of this character, he bore with patience and reſignation, leaving his people an example to follow his ſteps, and ſubmit to the will of God in all things, nor murmur at any of the diſpenſations of his Providence.

CHAP. XXXVII.

Our bleſſed Saviour is carried before the Roman Governor. The Traitor Judas becomes his own Executioner. Pilate publicly acquits Jeſus, and refers his Caſe to the Deciſion of Herod.

THE bleſſed Jeſus being thus condemned, by the unanimous voice of the grand aſſembly, it was reſolved to carry him before the governor, that he likewiſe might paſs ſentence on him. The Roman governors of Judea generally reſided at Cæſarea; but at the great feaſts they came up to Jeruſalem, to prevent or ſuppreſs tumults, and to adminiſter juſtice; it being a cuſtom for the Roman governors of provinces to viſit the principal towns under their

their jurisdiction, on this latter account. Pilate, being accordingly come to Jerusalem, some time before the feast, had been informed of the great ferment among the rulers, and the true character of the person on whose account it was raised; for he entertained a just notion of it: "He knew that for envy they had delivered him." He knew the cause of their envy, was impressed with a favourable opinion of Jesus, and wished, if possible, to deliver him from his vile persecutors.

Early in the morning, the Jewish council brought Jesus to the hall of judgment, or governor's palace. They themselves, however, went not into the hall, but stood without, lest they should be defiled, and rendered incapable of eating the passover.

Now Judas Iscariot, who had delivered his Master into the hands of the council, finding his project turned out very different from what he expected, was filled with the deepest remorse for what he had done. He saw all his golden dreams of temporal honours and advantages sunk at once to nothing; he saw his kind, his indulgent Master, condemned, and forsaken by all his followers. He saw all this, and determined to make all the satisfaction in his power, for the crime he had committed.

Accordingly, he came and confessed openly his sin, before the chief priests and elders, offered them the money they had given him to commit it, and earnestly wished he could recal the fatal transaction of the preceding night.

It seems he thought this was the most public testimony he could possibly give of his Master's innocence, and his own repentance. I have, said he, committed a most horrid crime, in betraying an innocent man to death.

But this moving speech of Judas had no effect on the callous hearts of the Jewish rulers. They affirmed, that however he might think the prisoner innocent, and for that reason had sinned in bringing the sentence of death upon his head, they were not to blame; because they knew him a blasphemer, who deserved to die. "What is that to us? said they, see thou to that." Nay, they even refused to take back the money they had given him as a reward for performing the base act of betraying his Master.

The deepest remorse now seized upon the wretched Judas, and his soul

ſoul was agitated by the horrors of deſpair. The innocence and benevolence of his Maſter, the many favours he himſelf had received from him, and the many kind offices he had done for the ſons and daughters of affliction, crowded at once into his mind, and rendered his torment intolerable. Racked with thoſe agonizing paſſions, and unable to ſupport the miſery, he threw down the wages of his iniquity in the temple; and confeſſing at the ſame time his own ſin, and the innocence of his Maſter, went away in deſpair, and hanged himſelf.

Thus periſhed Judas Iſcariot the traitor, a miſerable example of the fatal influence of covetouſneſs, and a ſtanding monument of divine vengeance to deter future generations from acting in oppoſition to the dictates of conſcience, through a love of the things of this world: for which this wretched mortal betrayed his Maſter, his friend, his Saviour, accumulated ſuch a load of guilt on himſelf, as ſunk his ſoul into the loweſt pit of perdition.

The pieces of ſilver caſt down by Judas were gathered up, and delivered to the prieſts, who thinking it unlawful to put them into the treaſury, becauſe they were the wages of a traitor, agreed to lay them out in purchaſing the potter's field, and to make it a common burial place for ſtrangers.

This the Evangeliſt tells us was done, that a particular prophecy, relating to the Meſſiah, might be fulfilled: "And they took the thirty pieces of ſilver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Iſrael did value; and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord had appointed." This prophecy is found in Zechariah; but by a miſtake of ſome copyiſt, the word Jeremiah is inſerted in the Greek manuſcripts of St. Matthew's goſpel, unleſs we ſuppoſe with the learned Grotius, that this remarkable prophecy was firſt made by Jeremiah, and afterwards repeated by the immediate direction of the ſpirit, by Zachariah; and that therefore the Evangeliſt has only aſcribed the prophecy to its original author. But whoever this be, the prophecy is remarkable, and was remarkably fulfilled. And the Evangeliſt, by thus appealing to a public tranſaction, puts the truth of this part of the hiſtory beyond all manner of exception.

We have already obſerved, that the chief prieſts and elders refuſed to go

go themſelves into the judgment-hall, leſt they ſhould contract ſome pollutions in the houſe of an heathen, which would have rendered them unfit for eating the paſſover. The ſame reaſon alſo hindered them from entering the governor's palace, on other feſtivals, when that magiſtrate attended in order to adminiſter juſtice: a kind of ſtructure was therefore erected, adjoining to the palace, which ſerved inſtead of a tribunal or judgment-ſeat. This ſtructure, called in the Hebrew Gabbatha, was finely paved with ſmall pieces of marble of different colours, being always expoſed to the weather. One ſide of the ſtructure joined to the palace, and a door was made in the wall, through which the governor paſſed to this tribunal. By this contrivance, the people might ſtand round the tribunal in the open air, hear and ſee the governor when he ſpake to them from the pavement: and obſerve the whole adminiſtration of juſtice, without danger of being defiled, either by him or any of his retinue.

Before this tribunal the great Redeemer of mankind was brought, and the prieſts and elders having taken their places round the pavement, the governor aſcended the judgment-ſeat, and aſked them what accuſation they brought againſt the priſoner? Though nothing could be more natural than for the governor to aſk this queſtion, yet the Jews thought themſelves highly affronted by it, and haughtily anſwered, if he had not been a very great and extraordinary malefactor, we ſhould not have given you this trouble at all, much leſs at ſo unſeaſonable an hour.

Pilate then examined Jeſus; and finding he had not been guilty either of rebellion or ſedition, but that he was accuſed of particulars relating to the religion and cuſtoms of the Jews, grew angry and ſaid, What are theſe things to me? Take him yourſelves and judge him, according to your own law. Plainly inſinuating, that in his opinion the crime they laid to the priſoner's charge was not of a capital nature; and that ſuch puniſhments as they were permitted by Cæſar to inflict were adequate to any miſdemeanor that Jeſus was charged with. But this propoſal of the Roman governor was abſolutely refuſed by the Jewiſh prieſts and elders, becauſe it condemned their whole proceeding; and therefore they anſwered, We have no power to put any one to

death, as this man certainly deſerves, who has attempted not only to make innovations in our religion, but alſo ſet up himſelf for a king.

This eagerneſs of the Jews to get Jeſus condemned by the Roman governor, who often ſentenced malefactors to be crucified, tended to fulfil the ſaying of our great Redeemer, who, during the courſe of his miniſtry, had often mentioned what kind of death he was, by the counſel of Omnipotence, appointed to die.

Pilate finding it impoſſible to prevent a tumult, unleſs he proceeded to try Jeſus, aſcended again the judgment ſeat, and commanded his accuſers to produce their accuſations againſt him. Accordingly they accuſed him of ſeditious practices, affirming that he had uſed every method in his power to diſſuade the people from paying taxes to Cæſar, pretending that he himſelf was the Meſſiah, the great king of the Jews ſo long expected. But they brought no proof of this aſſertion. They only inſinuated, that they had already convicted him of this crime; which was abſolutely falſe. Pilate, however, aſked him, Is it true what theſe men lay to your charge, that you have, indeed, attempted to ſet up yourſelf as the King of the Jews? To which Jeſus replied, have you ever, during your ſtay in this province, heard any thing of me, that gave you reaſon to ſuſpect me guilty of ſecret practices and ſeditious deſigns againſt the government? Or do you found your queſtion only on the preſent clamour and tumult that is raiſed againſt me? If this be the caſe, be very careful leſt you be impoſed on merely by the ambiguity of a word: for, to be king of the Jews is not to erect a temporal throne in oppoſition to that of Cæſar, but a thing of a very different nature; the kingdom of the Meſſiah is in the heavenly Canaan.

To which Pilate replied, Am I a Jew? Can I tell what your expectations are, and in what ſuperſtitious ſenſe you underſtand theſe words? The rulers and chiefs of your own people, who are the moſt proper judges of theſe particulars, have brought you before me, as a riotous and ſeditious perſon: if this be not the truth, let me know what is, and what is the crime thou haſt been guilty of.

Jeſus anſwered, I have, indeed, a kingdom, and this kingdom I have profeſſed to eſtabliſh. But then it is not of this world, nor have my endeavours

endeavours to eſtabliſh it any tendency to cauſe diſturbances in the government. For, had that been the caſe, my ſervants would have fought for me, and not ſuffered me to have fallen into the hands of the Jews. But I tell you plainly, my Kingdom is wholly ſpiritual. I reign in the hearts of my people, and ſubdue their wills and affections into a conformity to the will of God.

You acknowledge then, in general, anſwered Pilate, that you have pretended to be a king? To which the bleſſed Jeſus replied, In the ſenſe I have told you I have declared, and do now declare myſelf to be a king. For this very end I was born, and for this purpoſe I came into the world, that I ſhould bear witneſs to the truth; and whoſoever ſincerely loves, and is always ready to embrace the truth, will hear my teſtimony and be convinced by it.

Pilate anſwered, (What is truth) And immediately went out to the Jews, and ſaid unto them, I have again examined this man, but cannot find him guilty of any fault, which, according to the Roman law, is worthy of death.

This generous declaration made by the governor, of the innocence of our bleſſed Saviour, had no effect on the ſuperſtitious and biggotted Jews. They even perſiſted in their accuſations with more vehemence than before, affirming that he had attempted to raiſe a ſedition in Galilee: "He ſtirreth up (ſaid they) the people, beginning from Galilee to this place."

Jeſus, however, made no anſwer at all to this heavy charge. Nay, he continued ſilent, notwithſtanding the governor himſelf expreſsly required him to ſpeak in his own defence. A conduct ſo extraordinary, in ſuch circumſtances, aſtoniſhed Pilate exceedingly; for he had great reaſon to be perſuaded of the innocence of our dear Redemer. The truth is, he was altogether ignorant of the divine counſel, by which the whole affair was directed.

There were many reaſons which induced the bleſſed Jeſus not to make a public defence. He came into the world purely to redeem loſt and undone mankind, by offering up himſelf a ſacrifice to appeaſe the wrath of his Almighty Father; but had he pleaded with his uſual force, the people had, in all probability, been induced to aſk his releaſe, and conſequently his death had been prevented. Beſides, the groſs falſe-

hood

hood of the accuſation known to all the inhabitants of Galilee, rendered any reply abſolutely needleſs.

In the mean time the chief prieſts continued to accuſe him with great noiſe and tumult. And the meek and humble Jeſus ſtill continuing mute, Pilate ſpake again to him, ſaying, Wilt thou continue to make no defence? Doſt thou not hear how vehemently theſe men accuſe thee?

But Pilate, recollecting what the chief prieſts had ſaid with regard to a ſedition in Galilee, aſked if Jeſus came out of that country; and on being informed he did, he immediately ordered him to be carried to Herod, who was alſo then at Jeruſalem.

The governor ſuppoſed that Herod, in whoſe dominions the ſedition was ſaid to have been raiſed, muſt be a much better judge of the affair than himſelf. Beſides, his being a Jew rendered him more expert in the religion of his own country, and gave him greater influence over the chief prieſts and elders; he therefore conſidered him as the moſt proper perſon to prevail on the Jewiſh council to deſiſt from their cruel proſecution. But if, contrary to all human probability, he ſhould, at their ſolicitation, condemn Jeſus, Pilate hoped to eſcape the guilt and infamy of putting an innocent perſon to death. He might alſo propoſe by this action, to regain Herod's friendſhip, which he had formerly loſt by encroaching, in all probability, on his privileges.

But however that be, or whatever motive induced Pilate to ſend our great Redeemer to Herod, the latter greatly rejoiced at this opportunity of ſeeing Jeſus, hoping to have the pleaſure of beholding him perform ſome great miracle.

In this he was, however, miſtaken; for as Herod had apoſtatized from the doctrine of John the Baptiſt, to which he was once a convert, and had even put his teacher to death, the bleſſed Jeſus, however liberal of his miracles to the ſons and daughters of affliction, would not work them to gratify the curioſity of a tyrant, nor even anſwer one of the many queſtions he propoſed to him.

Herod, finding himſelf thus diſappointed, ordered our bleſſed Saviour to be clothed with an old robe, reſembling in colour thoſe worn by kings, and permitted his attendants to inſult him.

From Herod's dreſſing him in this manner, it evidently appears, that the

the chief prieſts and elders had accuſed him of nothing, but his having aſſumed the character of the Meſſiah, for the affront put upon him was plainly in deriſion of that pretenſion.

The other head of accuſation, namely, his having attempted to raiſe a ſedition in Galilee, on account of tribute paid to Cæſar, they did not dare to mention, as Herod could not fail of knowing it to be a groſs and malicious falſhood. And no crime worthy of death being laid to his charge, Herod ſent him again to Pilate. It ſeems, that though he was diſpleaſed with the great Redeemer of mankind for refuſing to work a miracle before him, yet he did not think proper to be unjuſt to him.

CHAP. XXXVIII.

The Roman Governor, for Want of Evidence, propoſes to acquit and releaſe Jeſus, three ſeparate Times, but at Length, at the preſſing Inſtigation of the inveterate Jews, he condemns and delivers him up.

THE Roman governor, in order to acquire popular applauſe, uſed generally, at the feaſt of the paſſover, to releaſe a priſoner nominated by the people. At this feaſt there was one in priſon, named Barabbas, who, at the head of a number of rebels, had made an inſurrection in the city, and committed murder during the confuſion.

The multitude being now again aſſembled before the governor's palace, began to call aloud on him to perform the annual office of mercy, cuſtomary at that feſtival.

Pilate, glad of this opportunity, told them, that he was very willing to grant the favour they deſired; and aſked them whether they would have Barabbas, or Jeſus, releaſed unto them? But without waiting for an anſwer, he offered to releaſe Jeſus, knowing that the chief prieſts had delivered him through envy; eſpecially as Herod had not found him guilty of the crimes laid to his charge.

While theſe particulars were tranſacting, Pilate received a meſſage from his wife, then with him at Jeruſalem, and who had that morning been informed of ſomething in a dream which gave her great uneaſineſs. The dream had ſo great an effect on this Roman lady, that ſhe could not reſt till ſhe had ſent an account of it to her huſband, who was then ſitting with the tribunal on the pavement, and begged him to have no hand in the death of the righteous perſon he was then judging.

The people had not yet determined whether they would have Jeſus or Barabbas releaſed to them; therefore when Pilate received the meſſage from his wife, he called the chief prieſts and rulers together, and in the hearing of the multitude, made a ſpeech to them, in which he gave them an account of the examination which Jeſus had undergone both at his own and Herod's tribunal, declaring that in both courts it had turned out honourably to his character; for which reaſon he propoſed to them, that he ſhould be the object of the people's favour.

Pilate did the prieſts the honour of deſiring to know their inclinations in particular, perhaps with a deſign to ſoften their ſtony hearts, and, if poſſible, to move them for once to pity an unhappy and innocent man.

But he was perſuaded that if pity was abſolutely baniſhed from their callous breaſts, his propoſal would have been acceptable to the people, whom he expected would embrace the firſt opportunity of declaring in his favour. Yet in this he was diſappointed. They cried out all at once, "Away with this man, and releaſe unto us Barabbas.

Apoſtate mortals! a few hours ago ye liſtened with rapture to his heavenly diſcourſes, beheld with tranſport the many ſalutary miracles wrought by this benevolent Son of the Moſt High, and earneſtly importuned him to take poſſeſſion of the throne and ſceptre of David! Now nothing will ſatiate your infernal malice, but his precious blood! But remember, ye miſcreants, ye monſters in human form, that this ſame Jeſus, whom ye beheld with ſuch contempt before the tribunal of the Roman governor; this Jeſus, whoſe blood your infernal mouths ſo loudly requeſted, ſhall one day come in the clouds of heaven to take vengeance on his enemies? And how will ye be able to bear the ſight of his appearance, when the very heavens themſelves will melt at his preſence, "the ſun become black as ſackcloth of hair," the moon be turned into blood, and the ſtars fly from their ſpheres? How will ye then repent of your unjuſt demand, and call to the mountains and rocks, to fall on you, and hide you from the preſence of that immaculate Lamb of God, the tremendous judge of the whole earth.

Pilate himſelf was aſtoniſhed at this determination of the multitude, and repeated his queſtion; for he could hardly believe what he had

had himſelf heard. But on their again declaring that they deſired Barabbas might be releaſed, he aſked them, what he ſhould do with Jeſus, which is called Chriſt? as if he had ſaid, you demand that Barabbas ſhould be releaſed; but what ſhall I then do with Jeſus? you cannot ſurely deſire me to crucify him, whom ſo many of you have acknowledged as your Meſſiah? "But they cried, ſaying, crucify him, crucify him. Then Pilate ſaith unto them, why, what evil hath he done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, crucify him."

They were ſo reſolutely determined to have him deſtroyed, that notwithſtanding the governor urged them again and again to deſire his releaſe, declared his innocence, and offered ſeveral times to diſmiſs him, they would not hear it, uttering their rage, ſometimes in hollow, diſtant, inarticulate murmurs, and ſometimes in furious outcries: to ſuch a pitch were their paſſions raiſed by the craft and artful inſinuations of their prieſts.

Pilate, finding it therefore in vain to ſtruggle with their prejudices, called for water, and waſhed his hands before the multitude, crying out, at the ſame time, that the priſoner had no fault, and that he himſelf was innocent of his blood.

By this action and declaration, Pilate ſeems to have intended to make impreſſion on the Jewiſh populace, by complying with the inſtitution of Moſes, which orders, in caſe of an unknown murder, the elders of the neareſt city to waſh their hands publicly, and ſay, "Our hands have not ſhed this blood." And in alluſion to this law, the Pſalmiſt ſays, "I will waſh mine hands in innocence." According, therefore, to the Jewiſh rite, Pilate made the moſt ſolemn and public declaration of the innocence of our dear Redeemer, and of his reſolution of having no hand in his death.

But notwithſtanding the ſolemnity of this declaration, the Jews continued inflexible, and cried out, with one voice, "His blood be on us and our children." Dreadful imprecation! It ſhocks humanity! An imprecation which brought on them the dreadful vengeance of Omnipotence, and is ſtill a heavy burden on that perfidious people!

The governor, finding it impoſſible to alter their choice, releaſed unto them Barabbas. And as it was the general practice of the Romans to ſcourge thoſe criminals they condemned

demned to be crucified, Pilate ordered the bleſſed Jeſus to be ſcourged, before he delivered him to the ſoldiers to be put to death.

The ſoldiers having ſcourged Jeſus, and received orders to crucify him, carried him into the Prætorium, or common hall, where they added the ſhame of diſgrace to the bitterneſs of his puniſhment; for, ſore as he was, by reaſon of the ſtripes they had given him, they dreſſed him in a purple robe, in deriſion of his being king of the Jews. Having dreſſed him in this robe of mock-majeſty, they put a reed in his hand, inſtead of a ſceptre, and after platting a wreath of thorns, they put it on his head for a crown; forcing it down in ſo rude a manner, that his temples were torn, and his face beſmeared with his moſt precious blood. To the Son of God in this condition, the rude ſoldiers bowed the knee, pretending to do it out of reſpect; but at the ſame time gave him ſevere blows on his head, which drove the prickles of the wreath afreſh into his temples, and then ſpit on him to expreſs their higheſt contempt.

The governor, whoſe office obliged him to be preſent at this ſhocking ſcene of inhumanity, was ready to burſt with grief. The ſight of an innocent and virtuous man treated with ſuch ſhocking barbarity, raiſed in his breaſt the moſt painful ſenſations of pity. And though he had given ſentence that it ſhould be as the Jews deſired, and had delivered our dear Redeemer to the ſoldiers to be crucified, he was perſuaded, that if he ſhewed him to the people in that condition, they muſt relent, and petition him to let him go.

Filled with this thought, he reſolved to carry him out, and exhibit to their view a ſpectacle capable of ſoftening the moſt envenomed, obdurate, enraged enemy. And in order to render the impreſſion ſtill more poignant, he went out himſelf, and ſaid unto them, Though I have ſentenced this man to die, and have ſcourged him as one that is to be crucified, yet I once more bring him before you, that I may again teſtify how fully I am perſuaded of his innocence; and that ye may yet have an opportunity of ſaving his life.

As ſoon as the governor had finiſhed his ſpeech, Jeſus appeared on the pavement, his hair, his face, his ſhoulders all clotted with blood, and the purple robe bedaubed with ſpittle. And that the ſight of Jeſus in

in this diſtreſs might make the greater impreſſion on the people, Pilate, while he was coming forward, cried out, "Behold the man!" As if he had ſaid, Will nothing make you relent? Have ye loſt all the feelings of humanity, and bowels of compaſſion? Can you bear to ſee the innocent, a ſon of Abraham, thus injured?

But all this was to no purpoſe. The prieſts, whoſe rage and malice had extinguiſhed not only the ſentiments of juſtice, and feelings of pity natural to the human heart, but alſo that love which countrymen bear for each other, no ſooner ſaw Jeſus, than they began to fear the fickle populace might relent; and therefore laying decency aſide, they led the way to the multitude, crying out, with all their might, Crucify him! crucify him!

Pilate, vexed to ſee the Jewiſh rulers thus obſtinately bent on the deſtruction of a perſon from whom they had nothing to fear that was dangerous, either with regard to their church or ſtate, paſſionately told them, that if they would have him crucified, they muſt do it themſelves: becauſe he would not ſuffer his people to murder a man who was guilty of no crime.

But this they alſo refuſed, thinking it diſhonourable to receive permiſſion to puniſh a perſon who had been more than once publicly declared innocent by his judge. Beſides, they conſidered with themſelves, that the governor might afterwards have called it ſedition, as the permiſſion had been extorted from him. Accordingly, they told him, that even though none of the things alledged againſt the priſoner were true, he had committed ſuch a crime, in preſence of the council itſelf, as by their law deſerved the moſt ignominious death. He had ſpoken blaſphemy, calling himſelf the Son of God, a title which no mortal could aſſume, without the higheſt degree of guilt; "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, becauſe he made himſelf the Son of God."

When Pilate heard that Jeſus called himſelf the Son of God, his fear was increaſed. Knowing the obſtinacy of the Jews in all matters of religion, he was afraid they would make a tumult, in earneſt; or perhaps he was himſelf more afraid than ever to take away his life, becauſe he ſuſpected it might be true. He doubtleſs, remembered the miracles ſaid to have been performed by Je-

ſus, and therefore ſuſpected that he really was the Son of God. For it is well known that religion, which the governor profeſſed, directed him to acknowledge the exiſtence of demi-gods and heroes, or men deſcended from the gods. Nay, the heathens believed, that their gods themſelves ſometimes appeared upon earth in the form of men.

Reflections of this kind induced Pilate to go again into the judgment-hall, and aſk Jeſus from what father he ſprung, and from what country he came? But our bleſſed Saviour gave him no anſwer, leſt the governor ſhould reverſe his ſentence, and abſolutely refuſe to crucify him.

Pilate marvelled greatly at this ſilence, and ſaid unto Jeſus, Why doſt thou refuſe to anſwer me? You cannot be ignorant that I am inveſted with abſolute power, either to releaſe or crucify you. To which Jeſus anſwered, I well know that you are Cæſar's ſervant, and accountable to him for your management. I forgive you any injury, which, contrary to your inclination, the popular fury conſtrains you to do unto me. Thou haſt thy power from above, from the emperor; for which cauſe, the Jewiſh high prieſt, who hath put me into thy hands, and by pretending that I am Cæſar's enemy, forces thee to condemn me; or if thou refuſeſt, will accuſe thee as negligent of the emperor's intereſt; he is more guilty than thou. "He that delivered me unto thee hath the greater ſin."

This ſweet and modeſt anſwer made ſuch an impreſſion on Pilate, that he went out to the people, and declared his intention of releaſing Jeſus, whether they gave their conſent or not. Upon which the chief prieſts and rulers of Iſrael cried out, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæſar's friend: whoſoever maketh himſelf a king, ſpeaketh againſt Cæſar." If thou releaſeſt the priſoner, who hath ſet himſelf up for a king, and endeavoured to raiſe a rebellion in the country, thou art unfaithful in the intereſt of the emperor thy maſter.

This argument was weighty, and ſhook Pilate's reſolution to the very baſis. He was terrified at the thought of being accuſed to Tiberius, who, in all affairs of government, always ſuſpected the worſt, and puniſhed the moſt minute crimes relative thereto with death.

The governor, being thus conſtrained to yield, contrary to his inclination, was very angry with the

prieſt

prieſt for ſtirring up the people to ſuch a pitch of madneſs, and determined to affront them.

He therefore brought Jeſus out, a ſecond time, into the pavement, wearing the purple robe and the crown of thorns; and, pointing to him, ſaid, "Behold your king!" ridiculing the national expectation of a Meſſiah.

This ſarcaſtical expreſſion ſtung them to the quick, and they cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him." To which Pilate anſwered, with the ſame mocking air, "Shall I crucify your king? The chief prieſts anſwered, We have no king, but Cæſar." Thus did they publicly renounce their hope of the Meſſiah, which the whole œconomy of their religion had been calculated to cheriſh: they alſo publicly acknowledged their ſubjection to the Romans: and, conſequently, condemned themſelves, when they afterwards rebelled againſt the emperor.

We cannot help obſerving here, that the great unwillingneſs of the governor to paſs ſentence of death upon Jeſus has ſomething in it very remarkable. For, from the character ot Pilate, as drawn by the Roman hiſtorians themſelves, he ſeems to have been far from poſſeſſing any true principle of virtue. To what then could it be owing, that ſo wicked a man ſhould ſo ſteadily adhere to the cauſe of innocence, which he defended with uncommon bravery, and perhaps would never have abandoned it, had it not been forced by the threatenings of the chief prieſts and rulers of Iſrael? And when he did yield, and paſſed ſentence of death upon our dear Redeemer, why did he ſtill declare him innocent? This can certainly be attributed to no other cauſe than to the ſecret but powerful direction of the providence of the Almighty, who intended that, at the ſame time his Son was condemned and executed as a malefactor, his innocence ſhould be made appear in the moſt public manner, and by the moſt authentic evidence, even that of the judge himſelf. It was the power of the Almighty that ſet bounds to the inveterate malice and fury of the Jews, that would not ſuffer them to ſtain the innocence of the bleſſed Jeſus, at the ſame time they deprived him of his life; but ſaid to their boiſterous malice, as he had before ſaid to the foaming billows of the ocean, "Hitherto ſhalt thou come, and no farther, and here ſhall thy proud waves be ſtayed."

CHAP.

CHAP. XXXIX.

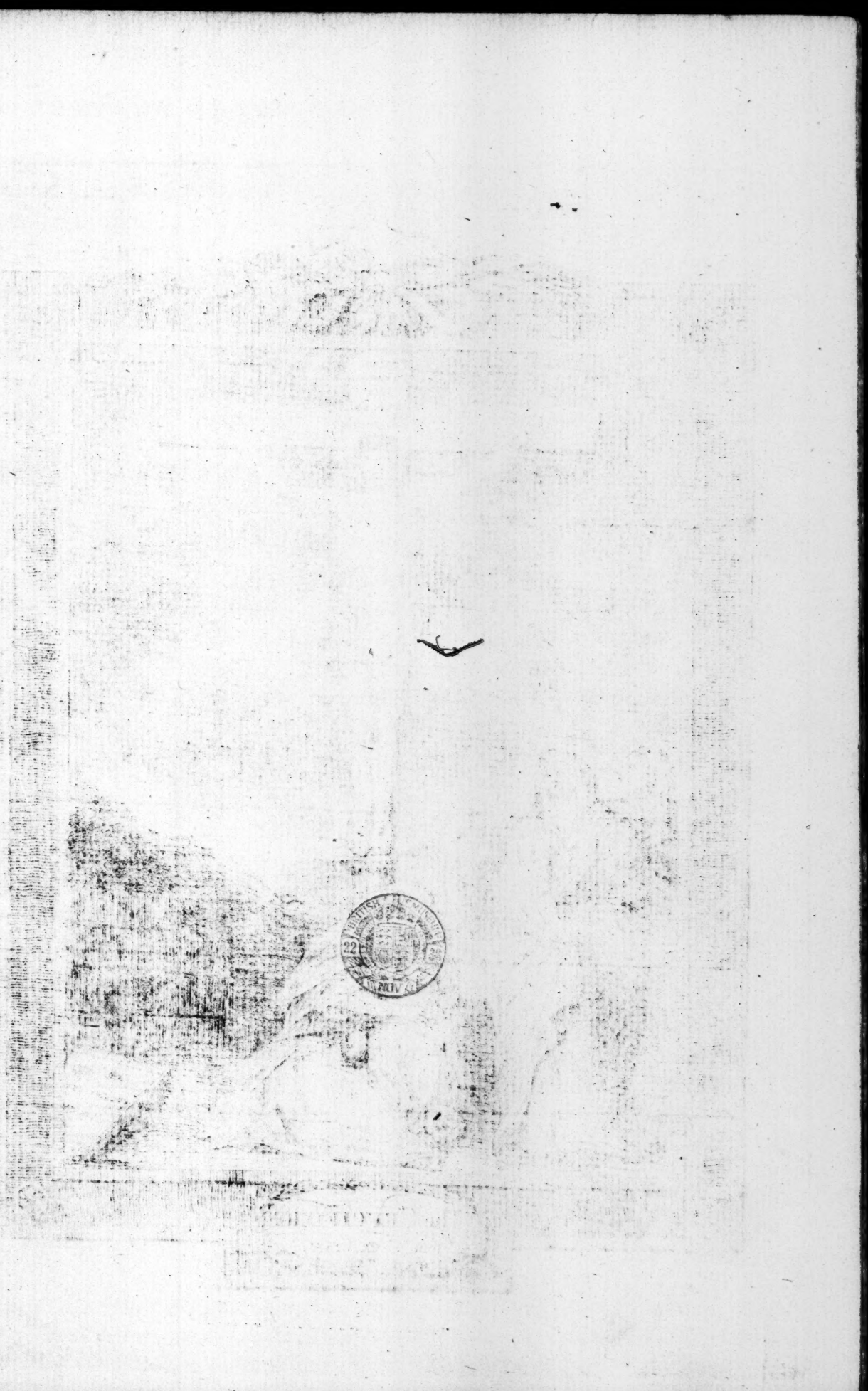
The innocent, immaculate Redeemer is led forth to mount Calvary, and there ignominiously crucified, between two notorious Malefactors. Reviled by the Spectators. A Phœnomenon appears on the important Occasion. Our Lord addresses his Friends from the Cross, and gives up the Ghost.

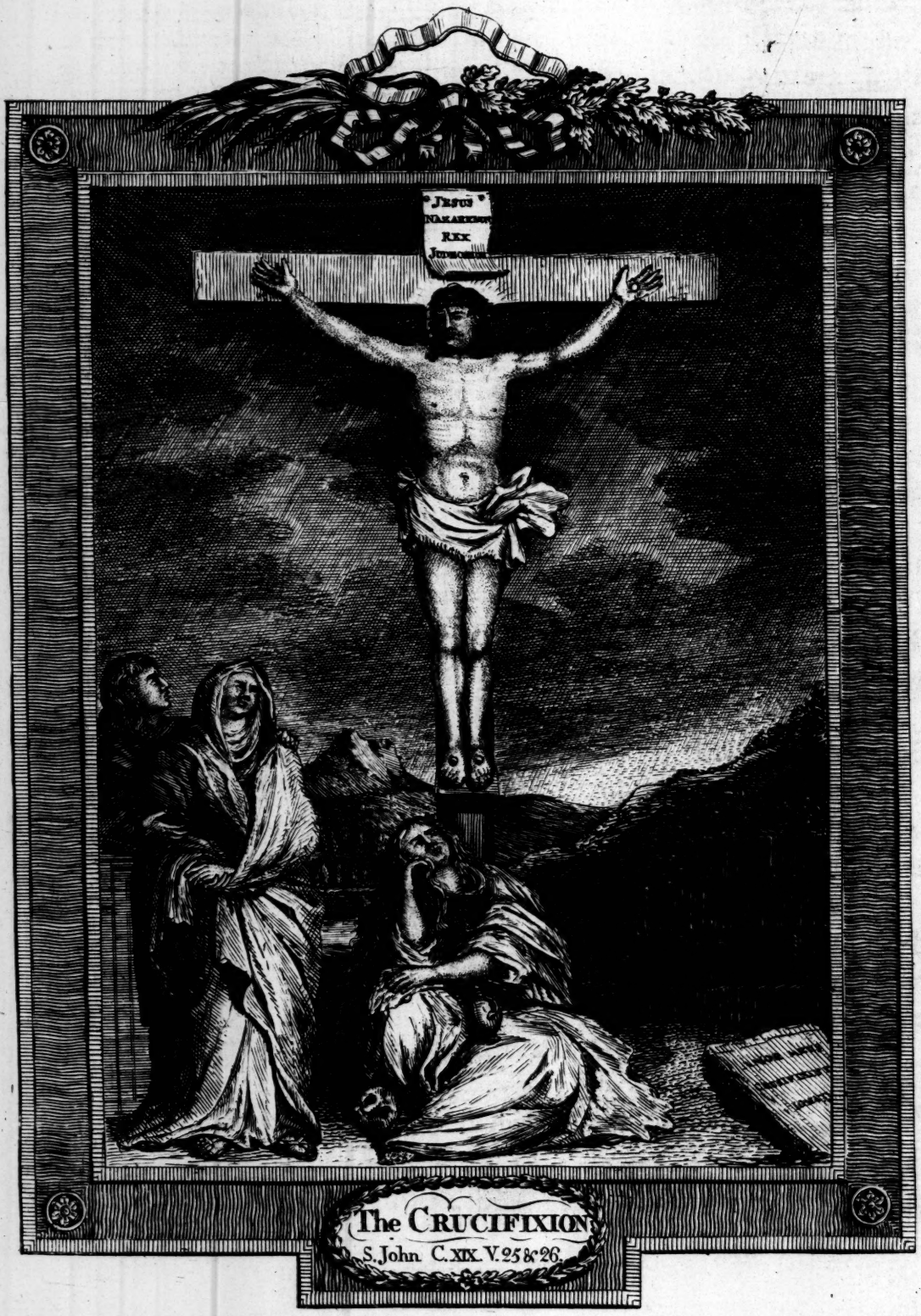
THE solemn, the awful period now approached, when the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world, was to undergo the oppressive burthen of our sins, upon the tree, and submit unto death, even the death of the cross, that we might live at the right hand of God, for ever and ever.

Sentence being pronounced against the blessed Jesus, the Soldiers were ordered to prepare for his execution, a command which they readily obeyed, and after cloathing him in his own garments, led him away to crucify him. It is not said that they took the crown of thorns from his temples; probably he died wearing it, that the title placed over his head might be the better understood.

It is not to be expected that the ministers of Jewish malice remitted any of the circumstances of affliction, which were ever laid on persons condemned to be crucified. Accordingly Jesus was obliged to walk on foot to the place of execution, bearing his cross. But the fatigue of the preceding night spent without sleep, the sufferings he had undergone in the garden, his having been hurried from place to place, and obliged to stand the whole time of his trials; the want of food, and the loss of blood he had sustained, and not his want of courage on this occasion, made him faint under the burden of his cross. The soldiers seeing him unable to bear the weight, laid it on one Simon, a native of Cyrene in Egypt, the father of Alexander and Rufus, well known among the first christians, and forced him to bear it after the great Redeemer of mankind. The soldiers did not, however, do this out of compassion to the sufferings of Jesus, but to prevent his dying with the fatigue, and by that means eluding his punishment.

The blessed Jesus, in his journey to Calvary, was followed by an innumerable multitude of people, particularly of women, who lamented bitterly the severity of his sentence, and shewed all the tokens of sincere compassion and grief. Jesus, who always felt the woes of others more than he did his own, forgetting his distress at the very time when it lay heaviest upon him, turned himself about,




The CRUCIFIXION
S. John C. XIX. V. 25 & 26.

about, and, with a benevolence and tenderneſs truly divine, ſaid to them, "Daughters of Jeruſalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourſelves, and for your children, For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they ſhall ſay, Bleſſed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave ſuck. Then ſhall they begin to ſay to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do theſe things in a green tree, what ſhall be done in the dry?" *Luke* xxiii. 28, &c. As if he had ſaid, Dry up theſe tears, ye daughters of Jeruſalem, which ye ſhed in compaſſion to me, and reſerve them for the deplorable fate of yourſelves, and of your children; for the calamities that will ſoon fall on you and your offſpring are truly terrible, and call for the bittereſt mentations. In thoſe days of vengeance ye will paſſionately wiſh that you had not given birth to a generation, whoſe wickedneſs has rendered them the objects of the wrath of the Almighty, to ſuch a degree, as never was before experienced in the world. Then ſhall they wiſh to be cruſhed under the weight of enormous mountains, and concealed from their enemies in the bowels of the hills. The thoughts of theſe calamities afflict my ſoul far more than the feeling of my own ſufferings. For if the Romans are permitted to inflict ſuch puniſhments on me, who am innocent, how dreadful muſt the vengeance be, which they ſhall inflict on a nation, whoſe ſins cry aloud to heaven, haſtening the peace of the divine judgment, and rendering the perpetrators as proper for puniſhment as dry wood is for the flames!

Being arrived at the place of execution, which was called Golgotha, or the Place of Skulls, from the criminals bones which they ſcattered there, ſome of our Redeemer's friends offered him a ſtupifying portion, to render him inſenſible to the ignominy and excruciating pain of his puniſhment. But as ſoon as he taſted the potion, he refuſed to drink it, being determined to bear his ſufferings, however ſharp, not by intoxicating and ſtupifying himſelf, but by the ſtrength of patience, fortitude, and faith.

Jeſus having refuſed the portion, the ſoldiers began to execute their orders, by ſtripping him quite naked, and in that condition began to faſten him to his croſs. But while they were piercing his hands and his feet with nails, inſtead of crying

out through the ſharpneſs of the pain, he calmly, though fervently, prayed for them, and for all thoſe who had any hand in his death; beſeeching the Almighty to forgive them, and excuſing them himſelf by the only circumſtance that could alleviate their guilt; I mean, their ignorance. "Father (ſaid the compaſſionate Redeemer of mankind) forgive them, for they know not what they do." This was infinite meekneſs and goodneſs, truly worthy of the only begotten Son of God, an example of forgiveneſs, which, though it can never be equalled by any, ſhould be imitated by all.

But behold the appointed ſoldiers dig the hole in which the croſs was to be erected!—The croſs is placed in the ground, and the bleſſed Jeſus lies on the bed of ſorrows.—They nail him to it.—His nerves crack.—His blood diſtills.—He hangs upon his wounds naked, a ſpectacle to heaven and earth.

Thus was the only begotten Son of God, who came down from heaven to ſave the world, crucified by his own creatures; and to render the ignominy ſtill greater, placed between two thieves. "Hear, O heavens! O earth, earth, earth, hear! The Lord hath nouriſhed and brought up children, and they have rebelled againſt him."

It was uſual for the crimes committed by malefactors to be written on a white board, with black, and placed over their heads, on the croſs. In conformity to this cuſtom, Pilate wrote a title in the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin languages, that all foreigners, as well as natives, might be able to read it, and faſtened it to the croſs, over the head of Jeſus; and the inſcription was, "This is the King of the Jews." But when the chief prieſts and elders had read this title, they were greatly diſpleaſed: becauſe, as it repreſented the crime for which Jeſus was condemned, it inſinuated that he had been acknowledged for the Meſſiah. Beſides, being placed over the head of one who was dying by the moſt infamous puniſhment, it implied that all who attempted to deliver the Jews ſhould periſh in the ſame manner. The faith and hope of the nation, therefore, being thus publicly ridiculed, it is no wonder that the prieſts thought themſelves highly affronted; and accordingly came to Pilate, begging that the writing might be altered. But as he had intended the affront in revenge for their forcing him to crucify Jeſus, contrary

contrary both to his judgment and inclination, he refuſed to grant their requeſt. "What I have written, (ſaid he) I have written."

When the ſoldiers had nailed the bleſſed Jeſus to the croſs, and erected it, they divided his garments among them. But his coat, or veſture, being without ſeam, woven from the top throughout, they agreed not to rent it, but to caſt lots for it, that the prediction of the prophet concerning the death and ſufferings of the Meſſiah, might be fulfiled. "They parted my garments among them, and for my veſture did they caſt lots." A ſufficient indication that every circumſtance of the death and paſſion of the bleſſed Jeſus was long before determined in the court of heaven; and accordingly his being crucified between two malefactors was expreſly foretold, "and he was numbered with the tranſgreſſors.

The common people, whom the vile prieſts had incenſed againſt the bleſſed Jeſus, by the malicious falſhoods they had ſpread concerning him, and which they pretended to have found on the depoſition of witneſſes: the common people, I ſay, ſeeing him hang in ſo infamous a manner upon the croſs, and reading the inſcription that was placed over his head, expreſſed their indignation at him by ſarcaſtical expreſſions, "Ah, thou, ſaid they that deſtroyed the temple, and buildeſt it in three days, ſave thyſelf and come down from the croſs."

But the common people were not the only perſons who mocked and derided the bleſſed Jeſus, while he was ſuffering to obtain the remiſſion of ſins for all mankind. The rulers who now imagined they had effectually deſtroyed his pretenſions to the character of the Meſſiah, joined the populace, in ridiculing him, and with a meanneſs of ſoul, which many infamous wretches would have ſcorned, mocked him, even while he was ſtruggling with the agonies of Death. They ſcoffed at the miracles by which he demonſtrated himſelf to be the Meſſiah, and promiſed to believe in him on condition of his proving his pretenſion, by eſcending from the croſs. "He ſaved others, ſaid they, himſelf he cannot ſave; if he be the king of Iſrael, let him now come down from the croſs, and we will believe him."

In the mean time nothing could be more falſe and hypocritical than this pretenſion of the ſtiff-necked Jews;

Jews; for they continued in their unbelief, notwithſtanding they well knew that he raiſed himſelf from the dead; a much greater miracle than his coming down from the croſs, would have been; a miracle atteſted by witneſſes whoſe veracity they could not call in queſtion. It was told them by the ſoldiers whom they themſelves placed at the ſepulchre, to watch the body, and who they were obliged to bribe largely to conceal the truth. It is therefore abundantly evident, that if the bleſſed Jeſus had deſcended from the croſs, the Jewiſh prieſts would have continued in their infidelity; and conſequently that their declaration was made with no other intention, than to inſult the Redeemer of mankind, thinking it impoſſible for him now to eſcape out of their hands.

The ſoldiers alſo joined in this general ſcene of mockery, "If thou be the king of the Jews, (ſaid they) ſave thyſelf." If thou art the great Meſſiah expected by the Jews, deſcend from the croſs by a miracle, and deliver thyſelf from theſe excruciating torments.

Nor could even one of the thieves forbear mocking the great Lord of heaven and earth, though labouring himſelf under the moſt racking pains, and ſtruggling with the agonies of death. But the other exerciſed a moſt extraordinary faith, at a time when our great Redeemer was deſerted by his Father, mocked by men, and hanged upon the croſs, as the moſt ignominious of malefactors. This Jewiſh criminal ſeems to have entertained a more rational and exalted notion of the Meſſiah's kingdom, than even the diſciples themſelves. They expected nothing but a ſecular empire; he gave ſtrong intimations of his having an idea of Chriſt's ſpiritual dominions; for at the very time when Jeſus was dying on the croſs, he begged to be remembered by him when he came into his kingdom. "Lord, ſaid he, remember me when thou comeſt into thy kingdom." Nor did he make this requeſt, in vain: the great Redeemer of mankind anſwered him, "Verily, I ſay unto thee, to-day ſhalt thou be with me in Paradiſe.

But let us attentively conſider the hiſtory of our bleſſed Saviour's paſſion, as it offers to our view events abſolutely aſtoniſhing. For when we remember the perfect innocence of our great Redeemer, the uncommon love he bore to the children of men, and the many kind and benevolent

volent offices he did for the ſons and daughters of affliction: when we reflect on the eſteem in which he was held all along by the common people, how chearfully they followed him to the remoteſt corners of the country, nay, even into the deſolate retreats of the wilderneſs, and with what pleaſure they liſtened to his diſcourſes; when we conſider theſe particulars, I ſay, we cannot help being aſtoniſhed to find them at the concluſion ruſhing all of a ſudden into the oppoſite extremes, and every individual, as it were, combined to treat him with the moſt barbarous cruelty.

When Pilate aſked the people if they deſired to have Jeſus releaſed, his diſciples, though they were very numerous, and might have made a great appearance in his behalf, remained abſolutely ſilent, as if they had been ſpeechleſs, or infatuated. The Roman ſoldiers, notwithſtanding their general had declared him innocent, inſulted him in the moſt inhuman manner. The Scribes and Phariſees ridiculed him. The common people, who had received him with Hoſannas, a few days before, mocked him as they paſſed by, and railed at him as a deceiver. Nay, the very thief on the croſs reviled him.

This ſudden revolution in the humours of the whole nation may ſeem unaccountable. But if we could aſſign a proper reaſon for the ſilence of the diſciples, the principles which influenced the reſt might be diſcovered in their ſeveral ſpeeches. The followers of the bleſſed Jeſus had attached themſelves to him in expectation of being raiſed to great wealth and power in his kingdom, which they expected would have been eſtabliſhed long before this time. But ſeeing no appearance at all of what they had ſo long hoped for, they permitted him to be condemned, perhaps becauſe they thought it would have obliged him to break the Roman yoke by miracle.

With reſpect to the ſoldiers, they were angry that any one ſhould pretend to royalty in Judea, where Cæſar had eſtabliſhed his authority. Hence they inſulted our bleſſed Saviour with the title of king, and paid him, in mockery, the honours of a ſovereign.

As for the common people, they ſeem to have loſt their opinion of him, probably becauſe he had neither convinced the council, nor reſcued himſelf when they condemned him. They began, therefore,

to conſider the ſtory of his pretending to deſtroy the temple, and build it in three days, as a kind of blaſphemy, becauſe it required divine power to execute ſuch an undertaking.

The prieſts and ſcribes were filled with the moſt implacable and diabolical malice againſt him; becauſe he had torn off their maſks of hypocriſy, and ſhewed them to the people in their true colours. It is therefore no wonder that they ridiculed his miracles from whence he derived his reputation.

In ſhort, the thief alſo fancied that he muſt have delivered both himſelf and them, if he had been the Meſſiah; but as no ſuch deliverance appeared, he upbraided him for making pretenſions to that high character.

But now, my ſoul, take one view of thy dying Saviour, breathing out his ſoul upon the croſs! Behold his unſpotted fleſh lacerated with ſtripes, by which thou art healed! See his hands extended and nailed to the croſs; thoſe beneficent hands, which were inceſſantly ſtretched out to unlooſe the heavy burdens, and to impart bleſſings of every kind! Behold his feet riveted to the accurſed tree with nails! thoſe feet which always went about doing good, and travelled far and near to ſpread the glad tidings of everlaſting ſalvation! View his tender temples incircled with a wreath of thorns, which ſhoot their keen afflictive points into his bleſſed head; that head which was ever meditating peace to poor loſt and undone ſinners, and ſpent many a wakeful night in ardent prayer, for their happineſs! See him labouring in the agonies of death! Breathing out his ſoul into the hands of his Almighty Father, and praying for his cruel enemies! Was ever love like this! was ever benevolence ſo finely diſplayed!

O my ſoul put thou thy truſt in that bleeding, that dying Saviour! Then, tho' the peſtilence walketh in darkneſs, and the ſickneſs deſtroyeth at noon day; though thouſands fall beſide thee, and ten thouſand at thy right hand, thou needeſt not fear the approach of any evil! Either the deſtroying angels ſhall paſs over thee, or diſpenſe the corrections of a friend, not the ſcourges of an enemy, which inſtead of hurting, will work for thy good. Then, though profaneneſs and infidelity, far more malignant evils, breathe their contagion, and taint multitudes around thee, thou ſhalt

ſhalt be ſafely hid in the hollow of his hand, and freed from every danger.

Come then, my ſoul, let us take ſanctuary under that tree of life, the ignominious croſs of thy bleeding Saviour, let us fly for ſafety to that city of refuge, opened in his bleeding wounds. Theſe will prove a ſacred hiding-place, not to be pierced by the flames of divine wrath, or the fiery darts of temptations. His dying merits, his perfect obedience, will be "as rivers of water in a dry place, or as the ſhadow of a great rock in a weary land."

But particularly in that laſt tremendous day, when the heavens ſhall be rent aſunder, and wrapped up like a ſcroll; when the Almighty arm ſhall arreſt the ſun in his career, and daſh the ſtructure of the univerſe to pieces; when the dead, both ſmall and great, ſhall be gathered before the throne of his glory, and the fates of all mankind hang on the very point of a final irreverſible deciſion: than if thou haſt faithfully truſted in him, and made his precepts thy conſtant directors, ſhalt thou be owned and defended by him. O! reader, may both thou that peruſeth, and him who hath written this for thy ſoul's advantage, be covered, at that unutterable important juncture, by the wings of his redeeming love; then ſhall we behold all the horrible convulſions of expiring nature, with compoſure, with comfort! we ſhall even welcome the conſummation of all things, at the "times of refreſhing from the preſence of the Lord."

But ſee the ſun, conſcious of the ſuffering of our Saviour, and as it were to hide his face from this deteſtable action of mortals, is wrapped in the pitchy mantle of chaotic darkneſs! This preternatural eclipſe of the ſun continued for three hours, to the great terror and aſtoniſhment of the people preſent at the execution of our dear Redeemer. And ſurely nothing could be more proper than this extraordinary alteration in the face of nature, while the ſun of righteouſneſs was withdrawing his beams, not only from the promiſed land, but from the whole world; for it was at once a miraculous teſtimony given by the Almighty himſelf to the innocence of his Son, and a proper emblem of the departure of him who was the light of the world, at leaſt till his luminous rays, like the beams of the morning, ſhone out anew with additional

ditional ſplendor, in the miniſtry of his apoſtles.

Nor was the darkneſs which now covered Judea and the neighbouring countries, beginning about noon and and continuing till Jeſus expired, the effect of an ordinary eclipſe of the ſun. It is well known that theſe phænomena can only happen at the change of the moon; whereas the Jewiſh paſſover, at which time our dear Redeemer ſuffered, was always celebrated at the full. Beſides, the total darkneſs of an eclipſe of the ſun never exceeds twelve or fifteen minutes, whereas this continued three full hours. Nothing, therefore, but the immediate hand of that Almighty Being, who placed the ſun in the centre of the planetary ſyſtem, could have produced this aſtoniſhing darkneſs. Nothing but God, who firſt lighted this glorious luminary of heaven, could have deprived it of its chearing rays. Now, ye ſcoffers of Iſrael, whoſe blood ye have ſo earneſtly deſired, and wiſhed it might fall upon you and your children, behold, all nature is dreſſed in the ſable veil of ſorrow, and, in a language that cannot be miſtaken, mourns the departure of its Lord and Maſter; weeps for your crimes, and deprecates the vengeance upon your heads! Happy for you that this ſuffering Jeſus is compaſſion itſelf, and even, in the agonies of death, prays to his heavenly Father to avert from you the ſtroke of his juſtice!

This preternatural eclipſe of the ſun was conſidered as a miracle by the heathens themſelves; and one of them cried out, "Either the world is at an end, or the God of nature ſuffers." And well might he uſe the expreſſion: for never, ſince this planetary ſyſtem was called from its primitive chaos, was known ſuch a deprivation of light in the glorious luminary of day. Indeed, when the Almighty puniſhed Pharaoh, for refuſing to let the children of Iſrael depart out of his land, the ſable veil of darkneſs was for three days drawn over Egypt. But this darkneſs was confined to a part of this kingdom; whereas, this that happened at our Saviour's crucifixion was univerſal.

When the darkneſs began, the diſciples naturally conſidered it as a prelude to the deliverance of their maſter. For though the chief prieſts, elders, and people, had ſarcaſtically deſired him to deſcend from the accurſed tree, his friends could not but be perſuaded, that he who had delivered

created limbs for the maimed, and eyes for the blind; who had given ſpeech to the dumb, and called the dead from the chambers of the duſt, might eaſily ſave himſelf, even from the croſs.

When, therefore, his mother, his mother's ſiſter, Mary Magdelene, and the beloved diſciple obſerved the veil of darkneſs begin to extend over the face of nature, they drew near to the foot of the croſs, probably in expectation that the ſon of God was going to ſhake the frame of the univerſe, unlooſe himſelf from the croſs, and take ample vengeance on his cruel and perfidious enemies.

The bleſſed Jeſus was now in the midſt of his ſufferings. Yet when he ſaw his mother and her companions, their grief greatly affected his tender breaſt, eſpecially the diſtreſs of his mother. The agonies of death, under which he was now labouring, could not prevent his expreſſing the moſt affectionate regard, both for her and for them. For that ſhe might have ſome conſolation to ſupport her under the greatneſs of her ſorrows, he told her, the diſciple whom he loved would, for the ſake of that love, ſupply his place to her after he was taken from them, even the place of a ſon: and therefore he deſired her to conſider him as ſuch, and expect from him all the duties of a child. "Woman, ſaid he, behold thy ſon!"

Nor was this remarkable token of filial affection towards his mother the only inſtance the dying Jeſus gave of his ſincere love to his friends and followers; the beloved diſciple had alſo a token of his high eſteem. He ſingled him out as the only perſon among his friends to ſupply his place with regard to his mother. Accordingly, he deſired him expreſſly to reverence her in the ſame manner as if ſhe had been his own parent. A duty which the favourite diſciple gladly undertook, carried her with him to his houſe, and maintained her from that hour to the day of her death, her huſband Joſeph, having, it ſeems, been dead ſome time.

Thus, in the midſt of the heavieſt ſufferings that human nature ever ſuſtained, the bleſſed Jeſus demonſtrated a divine ſtrength of benevolence. Even at the time when his his own diſtreſs was at the higheſt pitch, and nature was dreſſed in the robe of mourning for the ſufferings of the Redeemer of mankind; his friends had ſo large a ſhare of his concern, that their happineſs inter-

rupted the ſharpneſs of his pains, and, for a ſhort time, engroſſed his thoughts.

But now the moment, when he ſhould reſign his ſoul into the hands of his heavenly Father, approached, and he repeated part, at leaſt, of the twenty ſecond Pſalm, uttering, with a loud voice, theſe remarkable words, "Eli, Eli, lama ſabachthani? (that is,) My God, my God, why haſt thou forſaken me! (Or, as the words may be rendered) My God, my God, how long a time haſt thou forſaken me!"

Some believe that our bleſſed Saviour repeated the whole Pſalm; it being the cuſtom of the Jews, in making quotations, to mention only the firſt words of the Pſalm or Section, which they cite. If ſo, as this Pſalm contains the moſt remarkable particular of our dear Redeemer's paſſion, being, as it were, a ſummary of all the prophecies relative to that ſubject, by repeating it on the croſs, the bleſſed Jeſus ſignified that he was now accompliſhing the things that were predicted concerning the Meſſiah. And as the Pſalm is compoſed in the form of a prayer, by pronouncing it, at this time, he alſo claimed of his Father the performance of all the promiſes he had made, whether to him, or to his people, the chief of which are recorded in the latter part of the Pſalm.

Some of the people who ſtood by, when they heard our bleſſed Saviour pronounce the firſt words of the Pſalm, miſunderſtood him; probably from their not hearing him diſtinctly, and concluded that he called for Elias. Upon which one of them filled a ſpunge with vinegar, put it on a reed, and gave him to drink; being deſirous to keep him alive as long as poſſible, to ſee whether Elias would come to take him down from the croſs.

But as ſoon as Jeſus had taſted the vinegar, he ſaid, "it is finiſhed." That is, the work of man's redemption is accompliſhed; that great work which the only begotten Son of God came into the world to perform, is finiſhed. In ſpeaking theſe words, he cried with an exceeding loud voice; and after the ſhout, he addreſſed his Almighty Father, in words which from the beſt pattern of a recommendatory prayer, at the hour of death, "Father, into thy hands I commend my ſpirit." And having uttered theſe words, "he bowed his head, and yielded up the ghoſt."

But behold! at the very inſtant that

that the bleſſed Jeſus reſigned his ſoul into the hands of his heavenly Father, the veil of the temple was miraculouſly rent, from the top to the bottom; probably in the preſence of the prieſt, who burnt incenſe in the holy place, and who, doubtleſs, publiſhed the account when he came out: for our bleſſed Saviour expired at the ninth hour, the very time of offering the evening ſacrifice.

Nor was this the only miracle that happened at the death of the great Meſſiah; the earth trembled, from its very foundations, the flinty rocks burſt aſunder, and the ſepulchres hewn in them were opened; and many bodies of ſaints depoſited there awakened after his reſurrection, from the ſleep of death, left the gloomy chambers of the tomb, went into the city of Jeruſalem, and appeared unto many.

And as the rending the veil of the temple intimated, that the entrance into the holy place, the type of heaven, was now laid open to all nations; ſo the reſurrection of a number of ſaints from the dead demonſtrated, that the power of death, and the grave, was broken; the ſting was taken from death, and the victory wreſted from the grave. In ſhort, our dear Redeemer's conqueſts over the enemies of mankind were ſhewn to be complete; and an earneſt was given of the general reſurrection of the dead.

Nor did the remarkable particulars which attended that awful period, when Jeſus gave up the ghoſt, affect the natives of Judea only.—The Roman centurion, who was placed near the croſs to prevent diſorders of any kind, glorified the Almighty, and cried out, "Truly this was the Son of God!" And all the people when they beheld heaven itſelf bearing witneſs of the truth of our great Redeemer's miſſion, ſmote their breaſts, and retired.

They had been deſirous, with loud voices, to have him crucified; but when they ſaw the face of the creation wrapt in the gloomy mantle of darkneſs, during his crucifixion, and found his death, accompanied with an earthquake, as if nature had been in an agony when he died, they rightly interpreted theſe prodigies to be ſo many teſtimonies, from the Almighty, of his innocence; and their paſſions, which had been inflamed and exaſperated againſt him, became quite calm, or rather exerted in his behalf. Some were angry with themſelves for neglecting

glecting the opportunity the governor gave them of ſaving his life. Some were ſtung with remorſe for having been active in procuring Pilate to condemn him, and even offering the moſt bitter inſults, while he laboured under the moſt cruel ſufferings. And others were deeply affected at beholding the pains he ſuffered, which were undeſervedly ſevere.

Theſe various paſſions, being viſibly painted in their countenances, afforded a melancholy ſpectacle; the whole multitude returning from the cruel execution with their eyes fixed upon the earth, penſive and ſilent; their hearts ready to burſt with grief, groaning deeply within themſelves, ſhedding floods of tears, and ſmiting themſelves on their breaſts.

The grief they now felt for the bleſſed Jeſus was diſtinguiſhed from their former rage againſt him, by this remarkable particular, that their rage was entirely owing to the artful inſinuations of the prieſts; whereas their grief was genuine, and the natural feeling of their own hearts, greatly affected with the truth and innocence of him who was the object of their commiſeration. And as flattery had no ſhare in this mourning, ſo the expreſſions of their ſorrow were ſuch as diſtinguiſhed a real and unfeigned paſſion.

Thus was demonſtrated by many awful tokens, the truth, the divinity, the power of our Redeemer's miſſion; the blind, the obdurate Jews were ſtruck with horror, fully convinced, that the perſon they had cruelly put to death, was nothing leſs than the Son and Servant of God, the promiſed Meſſiah, the Saviour of the world.

CHAP. XL.

The bleſſed Jeſus is treated with Indignity after his Crucifixion. A pious Perſon begs his Body of Pilate, in order for Interment.

IT was expreſſly forbidden by the laws of Moſes, that the bodies of thoſe who were hanged ſhould remain all night on the tree. In conformity to this law, and becauſe the ſabbath was at hand, the Jews begged the governor, that the legs of the three perſons crucified might be broken, to haſten their death. To this requeſt Pilate readily conſented: and accordingly gave the neceſſary order to the ſoldiers for putting it in execution.

But on perceiving that Jeſus was already dead, the ſoldiers did not give themſelves the trouble of breaking his legs, as they had done

thoſe

thoſe of the two malefactors, that were crucified with him. One of them, however, either out of wantonneſs or cruelty, thruſt a ſpear into his ſide, and out of the wound, flowed blood and water.

This wound, therefore, was of the greateſt importance to mankind, as it abundantly demonſtrated the truth of our Saviour's death, and conſequently prevented all objections, that the enemies to our holy faith would otherwiſe have raiſed againſt it. The Evangeliſt adds, that the legs of our great Redeemer were not broken; but his ſide pierced, that two particular prophecies might be fulfilled, "A bone of him ſhall not be broken, and they ſhall look on him whom they have pierced."

Among the diſciples of our bleſſed Jeſus was one called Joſeph of Arimathea; a perſon equally remarkable for his birth, fortune and office. This man, who was not to be intimidated by the malice of his countrymen, went boldly to Pilate, and begged the body of his great Maſter. He had, indeed, nothing to fear from the Roman governor, who, during the whole courſe of our Saviour's trial, had ſhewn the greateſt inclination to releaſe him; but he had reaſon to apprehend that this action might draw upon him the malice of the rulers of the Jews, who had taken ſuch pains to get the Meſſiah crucified.

However, the great regard he had for the remains of his maker made him deſpiſe the malice of the Jews; being perſuaded that Omnipotence would defend him, and cover his enemies with ſhame and confuſion. And he well knew, that if no friend procured a grant of the body, it would be ignominiouſly caſt out among the executed malefactors.

Pilate was at firſt ſurpriſed at the requeſt of Joſeph, thinking it highly improbable that he ſhould be dead in ſo ſhort a time. He had, indeed, given orders for the ſoldiers to break the legs of the crucified perſons; but he knew it was common for them to live many hours after that operation was performed; for though the pain they felt muſt be exquiſite to the laſt degree, yet as the vital parts remained untouched, life would continue ſome time in the miſerable body.

The governor, therefore, called the centurion to know the truth of what Joſeph had told him; and being convinced from the anſwer of that officer, that Jeſus had been

dead ſome time, he readily gave the body to Joſeph.

This worthy counſellor, having obtained his requeſt, repaired to mount Calvary; and being aſſiſted by Nicodemus, took the body down from the croſs. The latter was formerly ſo cautious in viſiting Jeſus, that he came to him by night. But in paying the laſt duties to his Maſter, he uſed no art to conceal his deſign. He ſhewed a courage far ſuperior to that of any of the apoſtles, not only aſſiſting Joſeph in taking down the body of Jeſus from the croſs, but bringing with him a quantity of ſpices neceſſary in the burial of his Saviour.

Accordingly they wrapt the body with the ſpices in fine linen, and laid it in a new ſepulchre, which Joſeph had hewn out of a rock for himſelf. This ſepulchre was ſituated in a garden near mount Calvary; but being not intirely finiſhed, when they depoſited in it the body of the bleſſed Jeſus, they faſtened the door, by rolling on it a very large ſtone.

Oh! what a wonderful ſpectacle was now exhibited in this memorable ſepulchre! He who cloaths himſelf with light, as with a garment, and walks upon the wings of the wind, was pleaſed to wear the habiliments of mortality, and dwell among the proſtrate dead! Who can repeat the wonderous truth too often? Who can dwell upon the enchanting theme too long? He who ſits enthroned in glory, and diffuſes bliſs among all the heavenly hoſt, was once a pale and bloody corpſe, and preſſed the floor of this little ſepulchre!

O death! how great was thy triumph in that hour! never did thy gloomy realms contain ſuch a priſoner before—Priſoner, did I ſay? No, he was more than Conqueror. He aroſe far more mighty than Samſon from a tranſient ſlumber; broke down the gates, and demoliſhed the ſtrong holds of thoſe dark dominions. And this, O mortals, is your conſolation and ſecurity. Jeſus has trod the dreadful path, and ſmoothed it for your paſſage. Jeſus, ſleeping in the chambers of the tomb, has brightened the diſmal manſion, and left an inviting odour in thoſe beds of duſt. The dying Jeſus is your ſure protection, your unqueſtionable paſſport, through the territories of the grave. Believe in him, and they ſhall prove a highway to Sion; ſhall tranſmit you ſafe to Paradiſe. Believe in him, and you

ſhall

ſhall be no loſers, but unſpeakable gainers by your diſſolution. For hear what the oracle of heaven ſays, on this important point; "whoſo believeth in me ſhall never die." Death ſhall no longer be inflicted as a puniſhment, but rather vouchſafed as a bleſſing. The exit is the end of their frailty, and their entrance upon perfection: their laſt groan is the prelude to life and immortality.

But to return. The women of Galilee who had watched their dear Redeemer in his laſt moment, and accompanied his body to the ſepulchre, obſerving that the funeral rites were performed in a hurry, agreed among themſelves, as ſoon as the ſabbath was paſſed, to return to the ſepulchre, and embalm the body of their dead Saviour, by anointing and ſwathing him in the manner then common among the Jews. Accordingly, they returned to the city, and purchaſed the ſpices neceſſary for that purpoſe; Nicodemus having furniſhed only a mixture of myrrh and aloes.

During theſe tranſactions the chief prieſts and Phariſees, remembering that Jeſus had more than once predicted his own reſurrection, came to the governor, and informed him of it; begging, at the ſame time, that a guard might be placed at the ſepulchre, leſt his diſciples ſhould carry away the body and affirm that he was riſen from the dead. This happened a little before it was dark in the evening, called the next day that followed, by the Evangeliſt, becauſe the Jewiſh day began at ſun-ſet.

This requeſt being thought reaſonable by Pilate, he gave them leave to take as many ſoldiers as they pleaſed out of the cohort, which at the feaſt came from the caſtle of Antonia, and kept guard in the porticos of the temple. For that they were not Jewiſh, but Roman ſoldiers, whom the prieſts employed to watch the ſepulchre, is evident, from the aſking them of the governor. Beſides, when the ſoldiers returned with the news of our Saviour's reſurrection, the prieſts deſired them to report that his diſciples had ſtolen him away, while they ſlept: and to encourage them to tell the falſehood, boldly promiſed, that if their neglect of duty came to the governor's ears, proper methods ſhould be uſed to pacify him, and deliver them from any puniſhment: a promiſe which there was no need of making to their own ſervants.

The prieſts having thus obtained

a guard of Roman ſoldiers, men long accuſtomed to military duties, and therefore the moſt proper for watching the body, ſet out with them to the ſepulchre; and to prevent theſe guards from combining with the diſciples in carrying on any fraud, placed them at their poſt, and ſealed the ſtone which was rolled to the door of the ſepulchre.

Thus what was deſigned to expoſe the miſſion and doctrines of Jeſus, as rank falſehood, and vile impoſture, proved in fact the ſtrongeſt confirmation of the truth and divinity of the ſame, that could poſſibly be given: and placed what they wanted to refute, which was his reſurrection from the dead, even beyond a doubt.

CHAP. XLI.

Two pious Women go to view the Sepulchre of their crucified Lord and Saviour. An awful Phænomenon happens. A miniſtering Spirit deſcends. The Redeemer burſts the Chains of Death, and riſes from the Confines of the Grave.

VERY early in the morning, after the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, came to viſit the ſepulchre, in order to embalm our Lord's body; for the performance of which, they had, in conſort with ſeveral other women from Galilee, brought unguents and ſpices. But before they reached the ſepulchre, there was a great earthquake preceding the moſt memorable event that ever happened among the children of men, the reſurrection of the Son of God from the dead. "For the angel of the Lord deſcended from heaven, and came and rolled back the ſtone from the door of the ſepulchre, and ſat upon it: his countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as ſnow: and for fear of him the keepers did ſhake, and became as dead men;" they fled into the city, and the Saviour of the world roſe from the dead.

The angel, who had, till then, ſat upon the ſtone, quitted his ſtation, and entered into the ſepulchre. In the mean time Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, were ſtill on their way to the ſepulchre, together with Salome, who joined them on the road. As they proceeded on their way, they conſulted among themſelves, with regard to the method of putting their intention of embalming the body of their Maſter in execution; particularly with reſpect to the enormous ſtone which they had ſeen placed there, with the utmoſt difficulty, two days before. "Who, (ſaid they) ſhall roll away

away the ſtone from the door of the ſepulchre? for it was very great." But in the midſt of this deliberation about removing this great and ſole obſtacle to their deſign (for it does not appear they knew any thing of the guard) they lift up their eyes, and perceived it was already rolled away.

Alarmed at ſo extraordinary and ſo unexpected a circumſtance, Mary Magdalene concluded, that the ſtone could not be rolled away without ſome deſign; and that thoſe who rolled it away could have no other deſign, than that of removing our Lord's body. Being convinced, by appearances, that they had really done ſo, ſhe ran immediately to acquaint Peter and John of what ſhe had ſeen, and what ſhe ſuſpected; leaving Mary and Salome there, that if the other women ſhould arrive during her abſence, they might acquaint them with their ſurprize, at finding the ſtone removed, and of Mary Magdalene's running to inform the apoſtles of it.

In the mean time, the ſoldiers, who were terrified at ſeeing an awful meſſenger from on high roll away the ſtone from the door of the ſepulchre, and open it in the quality of a ſervant, fled into the city, and informed the Jewiſh rulers of theſe miraculous appearances. This account was highly mortifying to the chief prieſts, as it was a proof of our Saviour's reſurrection that could not be denied: they, therefore, reſolved to ſtifle it immediately; and accordingly bribed the ſoldiers to conceal the real fact, and to publiſh every where, that his diſciples had ſtolen the body out of the ſepulchre.

What! the body taken away while the ſepulchre was guarded by Roman ſoldiers! Yes, the diſciples ſtole the body while the ſoldiers ſlept! A ſtory ſo inconſiſtent, and which ſo evidently carries the marks of its own confutation with it, that it deſerves no anſwer.

The prieſts themſelves could not be ſo ſtupid as not to foreſee what conſtructions the world would put upon the relation of perſons, who pretended to know and tell what was done while they were aſleep.

CHAP. XLII.

The Angel addreſſes the pious Women. Two Diſciples go to the Sepulchre. Jeſus appears to Mary Magdalene. Afterwards to a Company of Women. Peter meets his Lord and Maſter, after his Reſurrection.

WHILE Mary Magdalene was going to inform the diſciples that the ſtone was rolled away

from the mouth of the ſepulchre, and the ſuppoſed body taken away, Mary and Salome continued advancing towards the ſepulchre, and at their arrival found what they expected, the body of their beloved Maſter gone from the place where it had been depoſited by Nicodemus and Joſeph of Arimathea; but at the ſame time beheld, to their great aſtoniſhment, a beautiful young man, in ſhining raiment, very glorious to behold, ſitting on the right ſide of the ſepulchre.

Matthew tells us, that it was the angel who had rolled away the ſtone, and frightened away the guards from the ſepulchre. It ſeems he had now laid aſide his terrors in which he was then arrayed, and aſſumed the form and dreſs of a human being, in order that theſe pious women, who had accompanied him during the greateſt part of the time of his public miniſtry, might be as little terrified as poſſible.

But notwithſtanding his beauty and benign appearance, they were greatly affrighted, and on the point of turning back, when the heavenly meſſenger, to baniſh their fears, told them, in a gentle accent, that he knew their errand. "Fear not, (ſaid he) for I know that ye ſeek Jeſus which was crucified. He is not here; for he is riſen, as he ſaid:" and then invited them to come down into the ſepulchre, and view the place where the Son of God had lain: that is, to look on the linen clothes, and the napkin that was about his head, and which he had left behind him when he aroſe from the dead: for to look at the place in any other view would not have tended to confirm their faith of his reſurrection.

The women, greatly encouraged by the agreeable news, as well as by the peculiar accent with which this ſweet meſſenger from the heavenly Canaan delivered his ſpeech, went down into the ſepulchre, when, behold, another of the angelic choir appeared!

They did not, however, yet ſeem to give credit to what was told them by the angel: and therefore the other gently chid them for ſeeking the living among the dead, with an intention to do him an office due only to the latter, and for not believing what was told them by a meſſenger from heaven, or rather for not remembering the words which their great Maſter had himſelf told them with regard to his own reſurrection. "Why ſeek ye the

the living among the dead? He is not here, but is riſen: remember how he ſpake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, ſaying, the ſon of man muſt be delivered into the hands of ſinful men, and be crucified, and the third day riſe again."

When the women had ſatisfied their curioſity by looking at the place where the Lord had lain, and where nothing was to be found but the linen clothes, the angel who firſt appeared to them reſumed the diſcourſe, and bade them go and tell his diſciples, particularly Peter, the glad tidings of his reſurrection from the dead: that he was going before them to Galilee; and that they ſhould there have the pleaſure of ſeeing him.

The reaſon why the diſciples were ordered to go into Galilee to meet their great and beloved Maſter, ſeems to be this: they were now moſt of them in Jeruſalem, celebrating the paſſover; and it may eaſily be imagined that, on receiving the news of their Lord's reſurrection, many, if not all of them, would reſolve to tarry in Jeruſalem, in expectation of meeting him: a thing which muſt have proved of great detriment to them, at that time of the year, when the harveſt was about to begin, the ſheaf of firſt fruits being always offered on the ſecond day of the paſſover-week.

In order, therefore, to prevent their ſtaying ſo long from home, the meſſage was ſent directing them to return into Galilee, with full aſſurance, that they ſhould there have the pleaſure of ſeeing their great Lord and Maſter; and by that means be happily relieved from the ſuſpicion of his being an impoſtor, which, doubtleſs, had ariſen in their minds, when they ſaw him expire on the croſs.

The women, highly elated with the news of their Lord's reſurrection, left the ſepulchre immediately, and ran to carry the diſciples theſe glad tidings.

During theſe tranſactions at the ſepulchre, Peter and John, having been informed by Mary Magdalene, that the ſtone was rolled away, and the body of Jeſus not to be found, were haſtening to the grave, and miſſed the woman who had ſeen this viſion of angels.

Theſe diſciples being aſtoniſhed at what Mary Magdalene had told them, and deſirous of having their doubts cleared up, made all the haſte poſſible to the ſepulchre; and John being younger than Peter arrived

rived at the ſepulchre firſt, but did not go in, contenting himſelf with ſtooping down and ſeeing the linen clothes lying which had been wrapped about our Saviour's body. Peter ſoon arrived, and went to the ſepulchre, where he ſaw the "linen clothes lie: and the napkin that was about his head not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itſelf."

Our Lord left the grave-clothes in the ſepulchre, to ſhew that his body was not ſtolen away by his diſciples, who in ſuch a caſe would not have taken time to have ſtripped it. Beſides, the circumſtances of the grave-clothes diſpoſed the diſciples themſelves to believe when the reſurrection was related to them. But they had not yet the leaſt ſuſpicion that he was riſen from the dead.

Theſe two diſciples having thus ſatisfied themſelves that what Mary Magdalene had told them was really true, returned to their reſpective habitations; but Mary continued weeping at the door of the ſepulchre. She had, it ſeems, followed Peter and John to the garden: but did not return with them, being anxious to find the body. Accordingly, ſtepping down into the ſepulchre to examine it once more, ſhe ſaw two angels ſitting, the one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jeſus had lain. They were now in the ſame poſition as when they appeared to the other women; but had rendered themſelves inviſible while Peter and John were at the ſepulchre.

On her beholding theſe heavenly meſſengers dreſſed in the robes of light, ſhe was greatly terrified. But they, in the moſt endearing accent, aſked her, "Woman, why weepeſt thou?" To which ſhe anſwered, "Becauſe they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." On pronouncing theſe words, ſhe turned herſelf about, and ſaw Jeſus ſtanding near her; but the terror ſhe was in, and the garments in which he was now dreſſed, prevented her from knowing him, for ſome time. Jeſus repeated the ſame queſtion uſed before by the angel, "Woman, why weepſt thou?" To which Mary, who now ſuppoſed him to be the gardener, anſwered, Sir, if his body be troubleſome in the ſepulchre, and thou haſt removed him, tell me where he is depoſited, and I will take him away.

But our bleſſed Saviour, willing to remove her anxiety, called her by

by her name, with his uſual tone of voice. On which ſhe immediately knew him: and falling down before him, would have embraced his knee, according to that modeſty and reverence with which the women of the eaſt ſaluted the men, eſpecially thoſe who were their ſuperiors in ſtation.

But Jeſus refuſed this compliment, telling her, that he was not going immediately into heaven. He was often to ſhew himſelf to the diſciples, before he aſcended; ſo that ſhe would have frequent opportunities of ſhewing her regard to him. And at the ſame time, ſaid to her, "Go to my brethren, and ſay unto them, I aſcend to my father and your father; and to my God and your God."

Thus did the bleſſed Jeſus contemplate, with a ſingular pleaſure, the work of redemption he had juſt finiſhed. The happy relation between God and man, which had been long cancelled by ſin, was now renewed. The Almighty, who had diſowned them on account of their rebellion, was again reconciled to them; he was become their God and Father: they were exalted to the honourable relation of Chriſt's brethen, and the ſon of God; and their father loved them with an affection far exceeding that of the moſt tender-hearted parent upon earth. The kindneſs of this meſſage, ſent by our dear Redeemer to his diſciples, will appear above all praiſe, if we remember their late behaviour. They had every one of them forſaken him, in the greateſt extremity: when he was ſcourged and mocked by the Roman ſoldiers, derided by his countrymen, and ſpitefully intreated by all, they hid themſelves in ſome place of ſafety, and preferred their own ſecurity to the deliverance of their maſter. When he fainted under the burden of his croſs, not one of them was there to aſſiſt him.

Simon, a Cyrenian, was compelled by the Roman ſoldiers to eaſe him of his ponderous burden. But notwithſtanding they had refuſed to aſſiſt their maſter during his ſufferings for the ſins of the world, he graciouſly, he freely forgave them; he aſſured them of their pardon, and called them even by the endearing name of brethren.

There is ſomething very remarkable in this part of the hiſtory. None of the apoſtles, or male diſciples, were honoured with the firſt viſions of the angels, or with the im-

mediate news of the reſurrection of the Son of God, much leſs with the apppearance of Jeſus himſelf.

The angels in the ſepulchre kept themſelves inviſible all the time that Peter and John were obſerving the linen clothes, and ſatisfying themſelves that the body of their maſter was not there. Perhaps the male diſciples in general were treated with this mark of diſreſpect, both becauſe they had, with ſhameful cowardice, forſaken their maſter when he was betrayed into the hands of his enemies, and becauſe their faith was ſo weak that they had abſolutely deſpaired of his being the Meſſiah when they ſaw him expire on the croſs. But how different was the conduct of the women! Laying aſide the weakneſs and timidity natural to their ſex, they ſhewed an uncommon magnanimity on this melancholy occaſion. For in contradiction to the whole nation, who with one voice required Jeſus to be crucified as a deceiver, they proclaimed his innocence by tears, cries, and lamentations, when they ſaw him led forth to ſuffer on mount Calvary; accompanied him to the croſs, the moſt infamous of all puniſhment; kindly waited on him in his expiring moments, giving him all the conſolation in their power, though at the ſame time the ſight of his ſuffering pierced them to the heart; and when he expired and was carried off, they accompanied him to his grave, not deſpairing, though they found he had not delivered himſelf, but to appearance was conquered by death, the univerſal enemy of mankind. Perhaps theſe pious woman entertained ſome faint hopes that he would ſtill revive. Or, if they did not entertain expectations of that kind, they at leaſt cheriſhed a ſtrong degree of love for their Lord, and determined to do him all the honour in their power.

A faith ſo remarkably ſtrong, a love ſo ardent, and a fortitude ſo unſhaken, could not fail of receiving diſtinguiſhed marks of the divine approbation: and they were accordingly honoured with the news of Chriſt's reſurrection before the male diſciples had their eyes cheered with the firſt ſight of their beloved Lord, after he aroſe from the chambers of the grave; ſo that they preached the joyful tidings of his reſurrection to the apoſtles themſelves.

But there ſeems to have been other reaſons why our great Redeemer ſhewed himſelf firſt to the women.

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The thoughts of the apoſtles were conſtantly fixed on a temporal kingdom, and they had wreſted all his words into an agreement with that favourite notion. And whatever they could not conſtrue as conſonant to that opinion, they ſeemed either to have diſbelieved, or diſregarded.

Hence, notwithſtanding Jeſus had foretold his own ſufferings no leſs than ſeven different times, they were aſtoniſhed above meaſure when they ſaw him expire on the croſs. Immortality and terreſtrial dominion were, according to their notion, the characteriſtics of the Meſſiah: for which reaſon, when they found, that, inſtead of eſtabliſhing himſelf in the poſſeſſion of univerſal empire, he had neither delivered himſelf, from an handful of enemies, nor even from death, they gave over all hopes of his being the Meſſiah. And as for his reſurrection, they ſeem not to have entertained the leaſt notion of it; ſo that when the news of this great event was brought to them, they conſidered it as an idle tale.

Not ſo the women: they were more ſubmiſſive to their Maſter's inſtructions, and conſequently were much better prepared for ſeeing him after his reſurrection, than the apoſtles: for though they did not expect that he would riſe from the dead, yet they were not prejudiced againſt it. This cannot be ſaid of the apoſtles: they not only abſolutely rejected the matter, at firſt, as a thing incredible, but even after they were acquainted with the accounts the ſoldiers had given of this great tranſaction; nay, after they had ſeen the bleſſed Jeſus himſelf, ſome of them were ſo unreaſonable as ſtill to doubt. How much rather then would their incredulity have led them to ſuſpect his appearing as an illuſion, had he ſhewn himſelf to them! Theſe reports led him to recollect the arguments proper for diſpoſing them to believe; particularly the prophecies that had been ſo often delivered in their own hearing, concerning his reſurrection. Hence the angels, when they told this event to the women, and deſired them to carry the news of it to his diſciples, put them in mind of the predictions Jeſus himſelf had made, as a confirmation of it. Hence we alſo ſee the reaſon why Jeſus, before he made himſelf known to the diſciples at Emmaus, had prepared them for a diſcovery, by expounding to them on the road, the ſeveral prophecies concerning the Meſſiah,

Meſſiah, contained in the Old Teſtament.

The women, on their arrival, told as many of the diſciples as they could find, that they had ſeen at the ſepulchre a viſion of angels, who aſſured them that Jeſus was riſen from the dead. This new information aſtoniſhed the diſciples exceedingly; and as they had before ſent Peter and John to examine into the truth of what Mary Magdalene had told them, concerning the body being removed out of the ſepulchre, ſo they now judged it highly proper to ſend ſome of their number to ſee the angels, and learn from them the joyful tidings of that great tranſaction, of which the women had given them an account.

That it was really the caſe appears from what the diſciples, in their journey to Emmaus, told their great Lord and Maſter; namely, that when the women came and told them that they had ſeen a viſion of angels, certain of their number went to the ſepulchre, and found it even as the women had ſaid, but him they ſaw not.

The ſecond deputation from the apoſtles did not go alone; for as Mary Magdalene returned with Peter and John, who were ſent to examine the truth of her information, ſo the women who brought an account of the viſion of angels, in all probability returned with thoſe who were ſent to be witneſſes of the truth of their report. Beſides curioſity, they had an errand thither. The angels had expreſſly ordered them to tell the news to Peter in particular; for which reaſon, when they underſtood that he was gone to the ſepulchre, it is natural to think they would return with the diſciples to ſeek him. About the time that the diſciples and women ſet out for the ſepulchre, Peter and John reached the city; but paſſing through a different ſtreet, did not meet their brethren.

The diſciples having a great deſire to reach the ſepulchre, ſoon left the women behind, and juſt as they arrived Mary Magdalene, having ſeen the Lord, was coming away. But they did not meet her, becauſe they entered the garden at one door, while ſhe was coming out at another. When they came to the ſepulchre, they ſaw the angels, and received from them the news of their bleſſed Maſter's reſurrection; for St. Luke tells us, "They found it even as the women had ſaid." Highly elated with their ſucceſs, they

they departed and ran back to the city, with ſuch expedition, that they gave an account of what they had ſeen in the hearing of the two diſciples, before Mary Magdalene arrived.

Nor will their ſpeed appear at all incredible, if we conſider that the nature of the tidings the apoſtles had to carry gave them wings, as it were, to make their brethren partakers of their joy at this ſurpriſing tranſaction.

In the mean time, the company of women, who followed the diſciples, happening to meet Peter and John, went forward in queſt of them. But they had not gone far from the ſepulchre, before Jeſus himſelf met them, and ſaid "All hail.'! On which they approached their great Lord and Maſter, "held him by the feet and worſhipped him." This favour of embracing his knees Jeſus had before refuſed to Mary Magdalene, becauſe it was not then neceſſary: but he granted it to the women, becauſe the angel's words having ſtrongly impreſſed their minds with the notion of his reſurrection, they might have taken his appearing for an illuſion of their own imagination, had he not permitted them to handle him, and convince themſelves by the united reports of their ſenſes. Beſides, if our Lord intended that Mary Magdalene ſhould go away as faſt as poſſible, and publiſh the news, he might hinder her from embracing his knees, to prevent her loſing any time.

This company of pious women having tarried ſome time with Jeſus on the road, did not arrive with the joyful tidings of their great Maſter's reſurrection till ſome time after Peter and John; and perhaps were overtaken by Mary Magdalene on the road, unleſs we ſuppoſe that ſhe arrived a few minutes before them. But be that as it may, this is certain, that they arrived either at, or near the ſame time; ſo that their accounts of this miraculous event tended to confirm each other.

The diſciples were now loſt in aſtoniſhment at what the women had related: they conſidered the account they had before given them of their having ſeen a viſion of angels as an idle tale, and now they ſeem to have conſidered this as ſomething worſe; for the Evangeliſt tells us, that they believed not.

Peter, indeed, to whom the angel ſent the meſſage, was diſpoſed, by his ſanguine temper, to give a

little more credit to their words than the reſt: poſſibly, becauſe the meſſengers from the heavenly Canaan had done him the honour of naming him in particular.

Elated with the reſpect paid him in particular, he immediately repaired again to the ſepulchre; hoping, in all probability, that his Maſter would appear to him, or at leaſt the angel, who had ſo particularly diſtinguiſhed him from the reſt of the diſciples.

As ſoon as Peter arrived at the ſepulchre, he ſtooped down, and ſeeing the linen clothes laying in the ſame manner as before, he viewed their poſition, the form in which they were laid, and returned, wondering greatly in himſelf at what had happened.

CHAP. XLIII.

Jeſus appears on divers Occaſions to different Diſciples. Reproves and convinces Thomas of his Unbelief. Shews himſelf to a great Number of his Followers in Galilee.

SOON after the women firſt returned to the diſciples with the news that they had ſeen a viſion of angels, who told them, that Jeſus was riſen from the dead, two of the brethren departed on their journey to a village called Emmaus, about two miles diſtant from Jeruſalem. The concern they were in, on account of the death of their great and beloved Maſter, was ſufficiently viſible in their countenances. And as they purſued their journey, talking with one another, and debating about the things that had lately happened among them, concerning the life and doctrine, the ſufferings and death of the holy Jeſus, and of the report that was juſt ſpread among his diſciples of his being that very morning riſen from the dead, Jeſus himſelf overtook them, and joined company with them.

As he appeared like a ſtranger, they did not in the leaſt ſuſpect that their fellow-traveller was no other than the great Redeemer of the ſons of men. He ſoon entered into diſcourſe with them, by enquiring what event had ſo cloſely engaged them in converſation, and why they appeared ſo ſorrowful and dejected, as if they had met with ſome heavy diſappointment?

One of them whoſe name was Cleophas, being ſurpriſed at the queſtion, replied, Is it poſſible that you can be ſo great a ſtranger to the affairs of the world, as to have been at Jeruſalem, and not have heard the ſurpriſing events that have happened

happened there? Events that have aſtoniſhed the whole city, and are now the conſtant topic of converſation among all the inhabitants? Jeſus anſwered, what ſurpriſing events do you mean? To which Cleophas replied, the tranſactions which have happened concerning Jeſus of Nazareth, who appeared as a great prophet and teacher ſent from God; and accordingly was highly venerated among the people, for the excellency of his doctrine, and the number, benefit, and greatneſs of his miracles. Our chief prieſts and elders, therefore, envying him as one who leſſened their authority over the people, apprehended him, and found means to put him to death. But we firmly believed he would have proved himſelf the Meſſiah, or great Deliverer. And this perſuaſion we long time ſupported; nor were we willing to abandon it, even when we ſaw him put to death. But it is now three days ſince theſe things were done; and therefore begin to fear we were miſtaken.

This very morning, indeed, a thing happened, which extremely ſurpriſes us, and we are very ſolicitous with regard to the event. Some women who had entertained the ſame hopes and expectations as we, going early in the morning to pay their laſt duties to their Maſter, by embalming his body, returned with great haſte to the city, and informed us, that they had been at the ſepulchre, but were diſappointed in not finding the body; and to increaſe our ſurprize they added, that they had ſeen a viſion of angels, who told them that Jeſus was riſen from the dead.

This relation appeared at firſt to us as an idle tale, altogether incredible: but two of the company going immediately after to the ſepulchre, found every thing exactly as the women had reported; they ſaw the angels, but heard not any thing of the body: ſo that we are ſtill in doubt and perplexity with regard to this wonderful event.

Jeſus replied, Why are ye ſo very averſe to believe all that the prophets have with one voice predicted concerning the Meſſiah? Is it not clearly, and very expreſſly foretold, in all the prophetic writings, that it was appointed by the counſel of Omnipotence for the Meſſiah to ſuffer in this manner, and that after ſuſtaining the greateſt indignities, reproach, and contempt, from the malice and perverſeneſs of mankind, and even undergoing an ignomini-

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ous and cruel death, he ſhould be exalted to a glorious and eternal kingdom? Having ſaid this, he began at the writings of Moſes, and explained to them, in order, all the principal paſſages, both in the books of that great legiſlator, and the writings of the other prophets, relating to his own ſufferings, death, and glorious reſurrection.

And this he did with ſuch ſurpriſing plainneſs, clearneſs, and ſtrength, that the two diſciples, not yet ſuſpecting who he was, were as much amazed to find a ſtranger ſo well acquainted with all that Jeſus did and ſuffered, as they at firſt wondered at his appearing to be totally ignorant of theſe tranſactions. They were alſo aſtoniſhed to hear him interpret and apply the ſcriptures to their preſent purpoſe, with ſuch readineſs and convincing clearneſs of argument, as carried with it a ſtrange and unuſual authority and efficacy. When, therefore, they came to the village whither they were going, and Jeſus ſeemed as if he would have paſſed on and travelled farther, they, deſirous of his company, preſſed him, in the ſtrongeſt manner, to tarry with them that night, as it was then late.

To this requeſt the great Redeemer of mankind conſented; and when they were ſat down to ſupper, he took bread and gave thanks to God, and brake it, and gave it to them, in the ſame manner he uſed to do, while he converſed with them upon earth, before his death. This engaged their attention, and looking ſtedfaſtly on him, they perceived it was their great and beloved Maſter.

But they had then no time to expreſs their joy and aſtoniſhment to their benevolent Redeemer: for he immediately vaniſhed out of their ſight.

As ſoon as they found their Maſter was departed, they ſaid one to another, how ſlow and ſtupid were we before, not to know him upon the road, while he explained to us the ſcriptures; when, beſides the affability of his diſcourſe, and the ſtrength and clearneſs of his argument, we perceived ſuch an authority in what he ſaid, and ſuch a powerful efficacy attending his words, and ſtriking our hearts with affection, that we could not but have known him, if we had not been remarkably ſtupid, to have been the very ſame that uſed to accompany his teaching, and was peculiar to it?

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This ſurpriſing event would not admit them to ſtay any longer in Emmaus. They returned that very night to Jeruſalem, and found the apoſtles, with ſeveral other diſciples, diſcourſing about the reſurrection of their Maſter; and on their entering the room the diſciples accoſted them, ſaying, "The Lord is riſen indeed, and hath appeared unto Simon."

They had given little credit to the reports of the women, ſuppoſing they were occaſioned more by imagination than reality. But when a perſon of Simon's capacity and gravity declared he had ſeen the Lord, they began to think that he was really riſen from the dead. And their belief was greatly confirmed by the arrival of the two diſciples from Emmaus, who declared to their brethren, how Jeſus had appeared to them on the road, and how they diſcovered him to be their Maſter, by breaking of bread.

While the diſciples from Emmaus were thus deſcribing the manner of the appearing of Jeſus to them, and offering arguments to convince thoſe who doubted the truth of it, their Maſter himſelf put an end to the debate, by ſtanding in the midſt of them, and ſaying, Peace be unto you.

This appearance of our bleſſed Saviour greatly terrified the diſciples who ſuppoſed they had ſeen a ſpirit; for having ſecured the doors of the houſe, where they were aſſembled, for fear of the Jews, and Jeſus having opened the locks by his miraculous power, without the knowledge of any in the houſe, it was natural for them to think that a ſpirit only could enter. The circumſtance therefore of the doors being ſhut, is very happily mentioned by St. John; becauſe it ſuggeſts a reaſon why the diſciples took their Maſter for a ſpirit, notwithſtanding many of them were convinced that he was really riſen from the dead, and were that moment converſing about his reſurrection.

But, to diſpel their fears and doubts, Jeſus came forward, and ſpoke to them in the moſt endearing accent: ſhewed them his hands and his feet, and deſired them to handle him, in order to convince themſelves by the united powers of their different ſenſes, that it was he himſelf, and no ſpectre or apparition. "Why are ye troubled, (ſaid the benevolent Redeemer of mankind) and why do thoughts ariſe in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myſelf: handle me and ſee,

for a ſpirit hath not fleſh and bones, as ye ſee me have."

Theſe infallible proofs ſufficiently convinced the diſciples of the truth of their Lord's reſurrection, and they received him with rapture and exultation. But their joy and wonder had ſo great an effect on their minds, that ſome of them, ſenſible of the great commotion they were in, ſuſpended their belief, till they had conſidered the matter more calmly. Jeſus, therefore, knowing their thoughts, called for meat, and eat with them, in order to prove more fully the truth of his reſurrection from the dead, and the reality of his preſence with them on this occaſion.

After giving this farther ocular demonſtration of his having vanquiſhed the power of death, and opened the tremendous portals of the grave, he again repeated his ſalutation, "Peace be unto you." Adding, "The ſame commiſſion that my Father hath given unto me, I give unto you: go ye therefore into every part of the world, and preach the goſpel to all the children of men." Then breathing on them, he ſaid, "Receive the Holy Ghoſt to direct and aſſiſt you in the execution of your commiſſion. Whoſoever embraces your doctrine, and ſincerely repents, ye ſhall remit his ſins, and your ſentence of abſolution ſhall be ratified and confirmed in the courts of heaven. And whoſoever either obſtinately rejects your doctrine, diſobeys it, or behaves himſelf unworthily, after he hath embraced it, his ſins ſhall not be forgiven him; but the cenſure ye ſhall paſs upon him on earth, ſhall be confirmed in heaven."

Thomas, otherwiſe called Didymus, was abſent, at this meeting of the apoſtles; nor did this happen without the ſpecial direction of Providence, that the particular and extraordinary ſatisfaction, which was afterwards granted him, might be an abundant and undeniable teſtimony of the truth of our bleſſed Saviour's reſurrection to all ſucceeding generations. The reſt of the apoſtles therefore told him, that they had ſeen the Lord, and repeated to him the words he had delivered in their hearing. But Thomas replied, "This event is of ſuch great importance, that unleſs, to prevent all poſſibility of deception, I ſee him with my own eyes, and feel him with mine own hands, putting my fingers into the print of his nails, whereby he was faſtened to the croſs, and thruſt my hand into his ſide,

ſide, which the ſoldier pierced with his ſpear; I will not believe that he is really and truly riſen from the dead."

Thus have we enumerated, in the moſt explicit manner, the tranſactions of that day on which the great Redeemer of mankind aroſe from the dead; a day highly to be remembered by the children of men, throughout all generations. A day, in which was fully compleated and diſplayed the conceptions lodged in the breaſt of infinite wiſdom from all eternity! even thoſe thoughts of love and mercy, on which the ſalvation of the world depended. Chriſtians have therefore the higheſt reaſon to ſolemnize this day with gladneſs, each returning week by ceaſing from their labour, and giving up themſelves to prayer, pious meditations, and other exerciſes of religion.

The redemption of mankind which they weekly commemorate affords matter for eternal thought; it is a ſubject impoſſible to be equalled, and whoſe luſtre neither length of time, nor frequent reviewing, can either tarniſh or diminiſh. It reſembles the ſun, which we behold always the ſame glorious and luminous object; for the benefit we celebrate is, after ſo many ages, as freſh and beautiful as ever, and will always continue the ſame, flouriſhing in the memories of pious people, through the endleſs revolutions of eternity. Redemption is the brighteſt mirror by which we contemplate the goodneſs of the Almighty. Other gifts are only mites from the divine treaſure; but redemption opens, I had almoſt ſaid exhauſts, all the ſtores of his grace. May it be conſtantly the favourite ſubject of our meditations, more delightful to our muſing minds, than applauſe to the ambitious ear! May it be the darling theme of our diſcourſe; ſweeter to our tongues than the dropping of the honey comb to the taſte! May it be our choiceſt comfort, through all the changes of this mortal life; and the reviving cordial, even in the laſt extremities of diſſolution itſelf!

Eight days after the reſurrection of our great Redeemer, the bleſſed Jeſus ſhewed himſelf again to his diſciples, while Thomas was with them; and upbraided that diſciple for his unbelief; but knowing that it did not, like that of the Phariſees proceed from a wicked mind, but from an honeſt heart, and ſincere deſire of being ſatisfied of the truth,

truth, he thus addreſſed himſelf to his doubting diſciple; "Thomas, ſaid he, ſince thou wilt not be contented to rely on the teſtimony of others, but muſt be convinced by the experience of thy own ſenſes, behold the wounds in my hands, and reach hither thy hand, and thruſt it into my ſide, and doubt no longer of the reality of my reſurrection."

Thomas immediately obeyed the kind invitation of his dear Maſter, and being fully ſatisfied according to his own deſire, he cried out, "I am abundantly convinced; thou art, indeed, my Lord, the very ſame that was crucified; and I acknowledge thy Almighty power, in having triumphed over death, and worſhip thee as my God."

To which the bleſſed Jeſus replied: "Becauſe thou haſt both ſeen and felt me, Thomas, thou haſt believed that I am really riſen from the dead. But bleſſed are they, who without ſuch evidence of the ſenſes, ſhall, upon credible teſtimony, be willing to believe and embrace a doctrine, which tends ſo greatly to the glory of God, and the ſalvation of the ſons of men."

St. John adds, that the bleſſed Jeſus appeared, on ſeveral other occaſions to his diſciples, after his reſurrection: and by many clear and infallible proofs, not mentioned by the Evangeliſt, fully convinced them that he was alive, after his paſſion. But thoſe which are mentioned are abundantly ſufficient to induce men to believe that Jeſus was the Son of God, the great Meſſiah ſo often foretold by the ancient prophets; and that by means of that belief they may obtain everlaſting life, in the happy regions of the heavenly Canaan.

Our bleſſed Saviour having firſt by the angels, and afterwards in perſon, ordered his diſciples to repair to their reſpective habitations in Galilee, it is reaſonable to think they would leave Jeruſalem as ſoon as poſſible. This they accordingly did, and on their arrival at their reſpective place of abode, applied themſelves to their uſual occupations; and the apoſtles returned to their old trade of fiſhing on the lake of Tiberius. Here they were toiling with their nets, very early in the morning, and ſaw Jeſus ſtanding on the ſhore, but did not then know him to be their Maſter, as it was ſomething dark, and they at a conſiderable diſtance from him.

He, however, called to them, and

and aſked if they had taken any fiſh; to which they anſwered, they had caught nothing. He then deſired them to let down their nets on the right ſide of the boat, and they ſhould not be diſappointed.

The diſciples imagining that he might be acquainted with the places proper for fiſhing, did as he had directed them, and incloſed in their net ſuch a prodigious multitude of fiſhes, that they were not able to draw it into the boat, but were forced to drag it after them in the water towards the ſhore.

It ſeems they had toiled all the preceding night to no purpoſe; and therefore ſuch remarkable ſucceſs could not fail of cauſing various conjectures among them with regard to the ſtranger on the ſhore, who had given them ſuch happy advice. Some of the apoſtles declared they could not imagine who he was; but others were perſuaded that this perſon was no other than their great and beloved Maſter. John was fully convinced of his being the Lord, and accordingly told his thoughts to Simon Peter, who making no doubt of it, girt on his fiſher's coat, and leaped into the ſea, in order to get aſhore ſooner than the boat could be brought to land, dragging after it a net full of large fiſhes.

When the diſciples came aſhore, they found a fire kindled, and on it a fiſh broiling, and near it ſome bread. But neither being ſufficient for the company, Jeſus bid them bring ſome of the fiſh they had now caught, and invited them to eat with him. Thus did the bleſſed Jeſus prove again to his diſciples the reality of his reſurrection, not only by eating with them, but by working a miracle like that, which at the beginning of his miniſtry, had made ſuch an impreſſion upon them, as diſpoſed them to be his conſtant followers.

This was the third time that Jeſus appeared publicly to a great number of his diſciples in a body, beſides his ſhewing himſelf at ſeveral times to particular perſons, upon ſpecial occaſions.

When they had eaten, Jeſus reminded Peter how diligent and zealous he ought to be in order to wipe off the ſtain of his denying him when he was carried before the high-prieſt, "Simon, ſon of Jonas," ſaid our bleſſed Saviour to him, "art thou more zealous and affectionate in thy love towards me, than the reſt of my diſciples?" To which Peter anſwered, "Yea, Lord: thou knoweſt that I love thee." He

was taught modeſty and diffidence by his late fall; and therefore would not compare himſelf with others, but humbly appealed to his Maſter's omniſcience, for the ſincerity of his regard to him. Jeſus anſwered, "Expreſs then thy love towards me, by the care of my flock committed to thy charge. "Feed my lambs, Feed my ſheep." Shew your love to me, by publiſhing the great ſalvation I have accompliſhed; and feeding the ſouls of faithful believers, with that food which never periſhes, but endures for ever and ever.

"I well know, indeed," continued the bleſſed Jeſus, "that thou wilt continue my faithful ſhepherd, even until death. For the time will come, when thou who now girdeſt on thy fiſher's coat voluntarily, and ſtretcheſt out thy hands to come to me, ſhalt in thine old age be girt by others, and forced to ſtretch out thy hands againſt thy will, in a very different manner, for the ſake of thy conſtant profeſſion of my religion."

By theſe laſt words Jeſus ſignified the manner of Peter's death, and that he ſhould finally ſuffer martyrdom, for the glory of God, and the teſtimony of the truth of the Chriſtian religion.

The time being now come when the diſciples were to meet their great Lord and Maſter, according to the meſſages he had ſent them by the women, and in all probability appointed at ſome former appearance not mentioned by the Evangeliſts, the brethren ſet out for the mountain in Galilee, perhaps that on which he was transfigured. Here five hundred of them were gathered together, expecting the joyful ſight of their great Maſter, after he had triumphed over death and the grave; ſome of them not having yet ſeen him after his reſurrection.

They did not wait long before Jeſus appeared, on which they were ſeized with rapture, their hearts overflowed with gladneſs, they approached their kind, their benevolent Maſter, and worſhipped him. Some few, indeed, doubted: it being then agreeable to their nature for men to be afraid to believe what they vehemently wiſhed, leſt they ſhould indulge themſelves in falſe joys, which vaniſh like a morning cloud. But Jeſus afterwards appeared frequently to them, and gave all of them full ſatisfaction, and inſtructed them in many things relating to their preaching the Goſpel,

pel, eſtabliſhing the church, and ſpreading it through the whole earth.

CHAP. XLIV

Our Lord's Aſcenſion. The Reſurrection of Jeſus aſſerted and vindicated, againſt the Objection of Unbelievers. General Review of the Life and Doctrines of the great Redeemer.

A Few days before the feaſt of Pentecoſt, or the feaſt of weeks, the diſciples went up to Jeruſalem, where the bleſſed Jeſus made his laſt appearance to them; and after inſtructing them in many particulars concerning the kingdom of God, and the manner they were to behave themſelves in propagating the doctrine of the Goſpel, he put them in mind that, during his abode with them in Galilee, he had often told them, that all things written in the law, the prophets, and the pſalms, concerning him, were to be exactly accompliſhed. At the ſame time, (he opened their underſtanding) that is, he removed their prejudices, by the operation of his ſpirit, cleared their doubts, improved their memories, ſtrengthened their judgments, and enabled them to diſcern the true meaning of the ſcriptures.

Having thus qualified them for receiving the truth, he again aſſured them, that both Moſes and the prophets had foretold, that the Meſſiah was to ſuffer in the very manner he had ſuffered; that he was to riſe from the dead, on the third day, as he had done; and that repentance and remiſſion of ſins was to be preached in the Meſſiah's name, among all nations, beginning with the Jews.

He next delivered unto them their commiſſion to preach the doctrine of repentance and remiſſion of ſins, in his name, among all nations, and to teſtify unto the world the exact accompliſhment in him, of all things foretold concerning the Meſſiah; and to enable them to perform this important work, promiſed to beſtow on them the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, which he called the promiſe of his Father; becauſe the Almighty had promiſed them by his prophets.

Having thus fortified them for the important work they were going to undertake, he led them on to the mount of Olives, as far as Bethany; where, ſtanding on a hill above the town, he told them that he was now raiſed to the government of heaven and earth: for which reaſon they might go courageouſly through all the world, and preach the Goſpel to every rational creature; aſſuring themſelves,

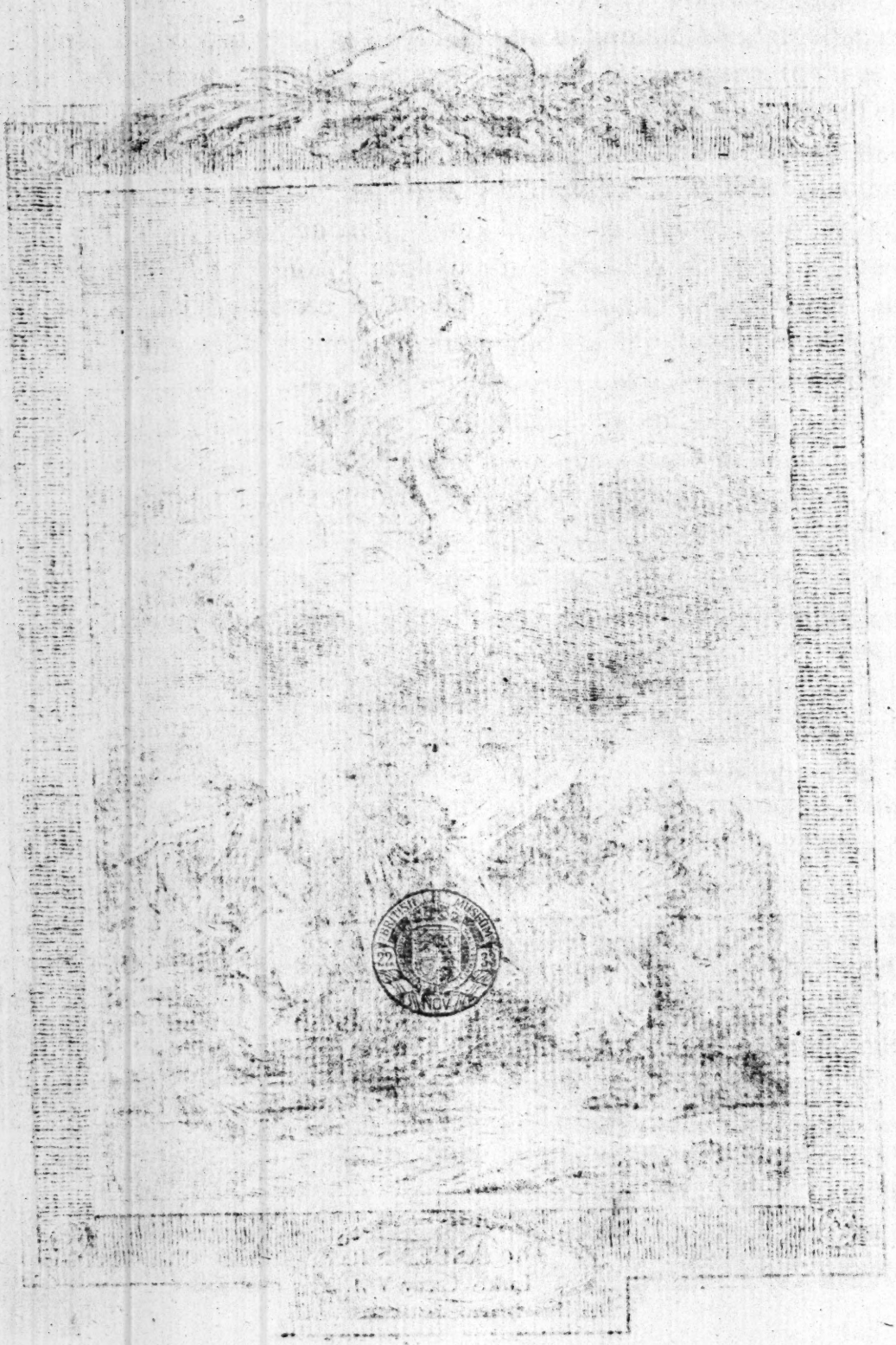
themſelves, that affairs in all countries ſhould be ſo ordered, as to diſpoſe the inhabitants for the reception of the goſpel: that they who believed were to be admitted into his church by the rite of baptiſm, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghoſt; and to be taught in conſequence of their baptiſm, to obey all the precepts he had enjoined them: that ſuch baptized believers ſhould receive the pardon of their ſins, together with eternal life in the happy manſions of his Father's kingdom; but ſuch as refuſed to embrace the doctrines of the goſpel ſhould be for ever excluded thoſe happy regions, and have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimſtone: that while they were employed in this work, he would be with them to the end of the world, to guide them by his council, to aſſiſt them by his ſpirit, and to protect them by his providence. Finally, that thoſe who ſhould through their preaching, be induced to believe, ſhould themſelves work moſt aſtoniſhing miracles, by which the goſpel ſhould be propagated with the greateſt rapidity.

When the bleſſed Jeſus had ſpoken theſe things, he lifted up his hands and bleſſed them. And in the action of bleſſing them, he was parted from them in the midſt of the day, a ſhining cloud receiving him out of their ſight; that is, this brilliant cloud encompaſſed him about, and carried him up to heaven: not ſuddenly, but at leiſure, that they might behold him departing, and ſee the proof of his having come down from heaven, as he had promiſed them.

The cloud in which the bleſſed Jeſus aſcended, was more bright and pure than the cleareſt lambent flame, being no other than the Schechinah, or glory of the Lord! the viſible ſymbol of the divine preſence which had ſo often appeared to the patriarchs of old; which filled the temple at its dedication, and which, in its greateſt ſplendor, cannot be beheld with mortal eyes; for which reaſon it is called the light inacceſſible in which the Almighty reſides.

As he aſcended, the flaming cloud that ſurrounded him, marked his paſſage through the air, but gradually loſt its magnitude in the eyes of thoſe who ſtood below; till it at laſt vaniſhed, together with their beloved Maſter, out of their ſight; for he was received up where the Deity manifeſts himſelf in a peculiar manner,


The ASCENSION
Luke Cxxiv. V51.



manner, and was ſet down on the right hand of the Majeſty on high: all power in heaven and on earth being now given him; and this univerſal government he will hold till he eſtabliſhes the dominion of righteouſneſs, when he will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, "that God may be all in all."

In this illuſtrious manner did the great Redeemer of mankind depart, after having finiſhed the grand work which he left the boſom of his Father to execute; a work which God himſelf, in the remoteſt eternity contemplated with pleaſure, which angels with joy deſcribed was to happen, and which through all eternity to come ſhall at periods, the moſt immenſely diſtant from the time of its execution, be looked back upon with inexpreſſible delight, by every inhabitant of heaven; for though the minute affairs of time may vaniſh altogether and be loſt, when they are removed far back by the endleſs progreſſion of duration, this object is ſuch, that no diſtance however great can leſſen it. The kingdom of heaven is erected on the incarnation and ſufferings of the Son of God, the kingdom and the city of the Almighty, comprehending all the people of God in the univerſe, made happy by goodneſs and love, and therefore none of them can ever forget the foundation on which their happineſs ſtands eſtabliſhed. The human ſpecies, in particular recovered by the labour of the Son of God, will view their Deliverer, and look back on his ſtupendous undertaking, with the higheſt rapture, while they are feaſting without interruption on its delicious fruits. The reſt of the members likewiſe of the city of God, will contemplate it with perpetual pleaſure, as the happy means of recovering their kindred that were loſt, and poſſibly the grand confirmation of the whole rational ſyſtem, in their ſubjection to him who reigneth for ever, and whoſe favour is better than life itſelf.

Thus have we followed our dear Redeemer through all the tranſactions of his life, and enlarged on the ſtupendous miracle of his reſurrection, as the whole chriſtian doctrine is founded on that glorious event. And from this hiſtory it is abundantly evident, that our bleſſed Saviour ſhewed himſelf to his diſciples and friends only, not to the Jews in general. This circumſtance gave Spinoſa a pretence for

raiſing an objection, which his diſciples have conſidered as the ſtrongeſt argument againſt our Lord's reſurrection. "If, ſay they, he really roſe from the dead, to have ſhewed himſelf to his enemies as well as to his friends, would have put the truth of his reſurrection beyond all doubt, than which nothing could be more neceſſary to the cauſe of Chriſtianity; and therefore, the ſuppoſition of his having confined his appearance after his reſurrection to a few ſelect friends only, renders the affair extremely ſuſpicious and improbable.

But this argument, however plauſible it may appear at firſt ſight, is deſtitute of the leaſt force; becauſe it may be demonſtrated, that if Jeſus had ſhewed himſelf to his enemies, and to all the people in general, theſe appearances, inſtead of putting the truth of his reſurrection beyond all doubt, would have weakened the evidence of it, at leaſt in after-ages; and, conſequently, have been of infinite prejudice to mankind; for, upon the ſuppoſition that our bleſſed Saviour had ſhewed himſelf openly, one of the two things muſt neceſſarily have happened: either his enemies, ſubmitting to the evidence of their ſenſes, would have believed his reſurrection; or reſiſting that evidence, they would reject it altogether. We ſhall firſt conſider the latter.

Thoſe enemies of the great Redeemer of mankind, who reſiſted the evidence of their ſenſes, or who, though really convinced, would not acknowledge their conviction, muſt have juſtified their diſbelief, by affirming, that the perſon who appeared to them, as riſen from the dead, was not Jeſus whom the Roman governor had crucified, but an impoſtor who perſonated him. On any other foundation their infidelity would have been ridiculous and abſurd; but, if the believing Jews, by our Lord's appearing perſonally to them, would have been laid under a neceſſity of denying the reality of his reſurrection, even though perſuaded of it in their own minds, the evidence of fact could have gained nothing by ſuch public appearance: becauſe the generality of the Jews were not capable of paſſing a judgment upon the falſehood which Chriſt's enemies muſt have made uſe of to ſupport their denial of his reſurrection. Being unacquainted with Jeſus, they could not certainly tell whether he was really the very perſon whom the Romans

Romans had crucified. His apoſtles, diſciples, and acquaintance, who, by their long attendance on him, knew his ſtature, ſhape, air, voice, and manner, were the only proper perſons by whoſe determination the point in diſpute could be decided: conſequently, if our Lord had appeared to all the people; if any conſiderable number of his enemies had continued in their infidelity, the whole ſtreſs of the evidence of his reſurrection muſt have reſted on the evidence of the very perſons, who, according to the plan pitched upon by Providence, bear witneſs to it now, and upon whoſe teſtimony the world has believed it. So that inſtead of gaining an additional evidence by the propoſed method of ſhewing Jeſus publicly to all the people, we ſhould have had nothing to truſt to but the teſtimony of his diſciples, and that clogged with this incumbrance, that his reſurrection was denied by many to whom he appeared, and who were not convinced thereby.

But, in the ſecond place, it may be ſuppoſed, that in caſe our bleſſed Saviour had ſhewed himſelf publicly, the whole nation of the Jews muſt have believed; and that future generations would thus have had the fulleſt evidence of the truth of his reſurrection.

This, however, will not appear to be the caſe, if we conſider, that the greateſt part of our Lord's enemies having not given themſelves the trouble of attending him often, cannot be ſuppoſed to have been ſo well acquainted with his perſon, as to know him with certainty. For which reaſon, though he had ſhewed himſelf to them, even their belief of his reſurrection muſt, in a great meaſure, have depended on the teſtimony of his diſciples and friends. If ſo, it is not very probable that his appearing publicly would have had any great effect on the Jews, to perſuade them to embrace a crucified Meſſiah. It is far more reaſonable to believe, that they would have rejected the whole, and continued in their infidelity.

But to give the argument all the force the Deiſts can deſire, let us ſuppoſe, that, in conſequence of our bleſſed Saviour's appearing to all the people of the Jews, the nation in general would have been convinced of the truth of his reſurrection, and become his diſciples; what advantage would the cauſe of Chriſtianity have reaped from ſuch effects of our Lord's public appearance? Would the

the evidence of his reſurrection have become thereby the more unqueſtionable? Or would the modern infidels have been the better diſpoſed to believe in this crucified Jeſus? By no means. For we do not find that men of this claſs are at all the more ready to believe the miracles of Moſes in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the Wilderneſs, becauſe the whole nation were witneſſes of them. The truth is, had our bleſſed Redeemer perſuaded all the people of the Jews, by appearing perſonally to them, the objections againſt his reſurrection would have been ten times more numerous and forcible than they are at preſent; for would not the whole have been called a ſtate trick, a Jewiſh fable, a mere political contrivance, to patch up their broken credit, after they had ſo long talked of a Meſſiah, who was to come at that time? Beſides, we ſhould certainly have been told, that the government being engaged in the plot, a fraud of this kind might have eaſily been carried on, eſpecially as the people in general would eagerly fall in with it; becauſe it was ſo exactly adapted to their prejudices, and becauſe the few who had ſagacity enough to detect the fraud, could have no opportunity of examining into it. Or, if they did examine and detect the fraud, would not have dared to make any diſcovery of it, in oppoſition to the whole weight of the ſtate: ſo that they would let it paſs quietly, without once calling it in queſtion.

To ſay the truth, the reſurrection of our great Redeemer, univerſally believed among the Jews, and publiſhed to the world, by the unanimous voice of the nation, would have been liable to an infinite number of objections, which are all effectually cut off by the ſcheme made choice of by the wiſdom of Providence: for as the people in general, and the rulers in particular, continued in their infidelity, the perſons concerned in this ſuppoſed fraud muſt have carried it on under the greateſt diſadvantages.

The reaſon is, that inſtead of making many friends to aſſiſt them, which a fraud of this kind requires, all men were their enemies, and intereſted to diſcover the cheat. The Jewiſh rulers, in particular, gave all poſſible encouragement to make the ſtricteſt ſcrutiny into the fact, and into all its circumſtances; and many, doubtleſs, zealouſly made the enquiry with the utmoſt exactneſs. The apoſtles

apoſtles who preached the reſurrection, expoſed themſelves to the fierceſt reſentment of the men in power; becauſe the reſurrection of our great Redeemer caſt the greateſt reflection upon thoſe who had put him to death. It ſhould alſo be remembered, that if the generality of the nation had not continued in their unbelief, the apoſtles, who preached the reſurrection, would not have ſuffered thoſe perſecutions which in every country were raiſed againſt them, chiefly by the Jews; and conſequently one of the ſtrongeſt arguments for the truth of their teſtimony would have been wanting: whereas, by their having been perſecuted to death for their preaching the reſurrection of their great Maſter, they fully demonſtrated how ſincerely they believed the great fact which they preached in continual jeopardy of their lives.

Thus have we endeavoured to anſwer, in the plaineſt and moſt ſatisfactory manner, the principal objection made by the Deiſts againſt the truth of our bleſſed Saviour's reſurrection: and ſhall conclude this chapter with a few reflections on the life of the bleſſed Jeſus, a life the greateſt and beſt that was ever led by man, or was ever the ſubject of any hiſtory, ſince the univerſe was called from its original chaos, by the powerful word of the Almighty.

The human character of the bleſſed Jeſus, as it reſults from the account given of him by the Evangeliſts, for they have not formally drawn it up, is entirely different from that of all other men whatſoever: for whereas they have ſelfiſh paſſions deeply rooted in their breaſts, and are influenced by them in almoſt every thing they do, Jeſus was ſo entirely free from them, that the moſt ſevere ſcrutiny cannot furniſh one ſingle action in the whole courſe of his life wherein he conſulted his own intereſt only. No, he was influenced by very different motives; the preſent happineſs and eternal welfare of ſinners, regulated his conduct; and while others followed their reſpective occupations, Jeſus had no other buſineſs than that of promoting the happineſs of the ſons of men. Nor did he wait till he was ſolicited to extend his benevolent hand to the diſtreſſed: "he went about doing good, (and always accounted it) more bleſſed to give than to receive;" reſembling God rather than man. He went about doing good; benevolence was the very life of his ſoul: he not only

did good to objects presented to him for relief; but he industriously sought them out, in order to extend his compassionate assistance.

It is common for persons of the most exalted faculties to be elated with success and applause, or dejected by censure and disappointments: but the blessed Jesus was never elevated by the one, nor depressed by the other. He was never more courageous, than when he met with the greatest opposition and cruel treatment; nor more humble than when the sons of men worshipped at his feet.

He came into the world inspired with the grandest purpose that ever was formed, that of saving from eternal perdition, not a single nation, but the whole world; and in the execution of it, went through the longest and heaviest train of labours that ever was sustained, with a constancy and resolution, on which no disadvantageous impression could be made by any accident whatever. Calumny, threatenings, bad success, with many other evils constantly attending him, served only to quicken his endeavours in this glorious enterprize, which he unweariedly pursued even till he finished it by his death.

The generality of mankind are prone to retaliate injuries received, and all seem to take a satisfaction in complaining of the cruelties of those who oppress them; whereas the whole of Christ's labours breathed nothing but meekness, patience, and forgiveness, even to his bitterest enemies, and in the midst of the most excruciating torments. The words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," uttered by him when his enemies were nailing him to the cross, fitly express the temper which he maintained through the whole course of his life, even when assaulted by the heaviest provocations. He was destined to sufferings here below, in order that he might raise his people to honour, glory, and immortality, in the realms of bliss above; and therefore patiently, yea, joyfully, submitted to all that the malice of earth and hell could inflict. He was vilified, that we might be honoured: he died, that we might live, for ever and ever.

To conclude: the greatest and best men have discovered the degeneracy and corruption of human nature, and shewn them to have been nothing more than men: but it was otherwise with Jesus. He was superior

perior to all the men that ever lived, both with regard to the purity of his manners, and the perfection of his virtues. He was holy, harmleſs, undefiled, and ſeparated from ſinners.

Whether we conſider him as a teacher, or as a man, "he did no ſin; neither was guile found in his mouth." His whole life was perfectly free from ſpot or weakneſs; at the ſame time it was remarkable for the greateſt and extenſive exerciſes of virtue. But never to have committed the leaſt ſin, in word or in deed, never to have uttered any ſentiment that could be cenſured, upon the various topics of religion and morality, which were the daily ſubjects of his diſcourſes, and that through the courſe of a life filled with action, and led under the obſervation of many enemies, who had always acceſs to converſe with him, and who often came to find fault, is a pitch of perfection evidently above the reach of human nature; and conſequently he who poſſeſſed it muſt have been more than human.

Such was the perſon who is the ſubject of the evangelical hiſtory. If the reader, by reviewing his life, doctrine and miracles, as they are here repreſented to him, united in one ſeries, have a clearer idea of theſe things than before, or obſerve a beauty in his actions thus linked together, which taken ſeparately do not appear ſo fully; if he feel himſelf touched by the character of Jeſus in general, or with any of his ſermons and actions in particular, thus ſimply delineated in writing, whoſe principal charms are the beatics of truth: above all, if his dying ſo generouſly for men ſtrike him with admiration, or fill him with joy in the proſpect of that pardon which is thereby purchaſed for the world: let him ſeriouſly conſider with himſelf what improvement he ought to make of the divine goodneſs.

Jeſus, by his death, hath ſet open the gates of immortality to the ſons of men; and by his word, ſpirit and example, graciouſly offers to make them meet for the glorious rewards in the kingdom of the heavenly Canaan, and to conduct them into the inheritance of the ſaints in light. Let us, therefore, remember, that being born under the diſpenſation of his goſpel, we have, from our earlieſt years, enjoyed the beſt means of ſecuring to ourſelves an intereſt in that favour of God, which is life; and that loving-kindneſs, which is better than life. We

We have been called to aſpire after an exaltation to the nature and felicity of the Almighty, exhibited in the mortal eyes in the man Chriſt Jeſus, to fire us with the nobleſt ambition. His Goſpel teaches us that we are made for eternity; and that our preſent life is to our future exiſtence, as infancy is to manhood. But as in the former, many things are to be learned, many hardſhips to be endured, many habits to be acquired, and that by a courſe of exerciſes, which in themſelves though painful, and poſſibly uſeful to the child, yet are neceſſary to fit him for the buſineſs and enjoyments of manhood. So while we remain in this infancy of human life, things are to be learned, hardſhips to be endured, and habits to be acquired by a laborious diſcipline, which, however painful, muſt be undergone, becauſe neceſſary to fit us for the employments and pleaſure of our riper exiſtence, in the realms above, always remembering that whatever our trials may be, in this world, if we aſk for God's aſſiſtance, he has promiſed to give it. Enflamed, therefore, with the love of immortallity and its joys, let us ſubmit ourſelves to our heavenly teacher, and learn of him thoſe graces, which alone can render life pleaſant, death deſirable, and fill eternity with ecſtatic joys.

CHAP. XLV.

Remarks on the peculiar Nature of the Chriſtian Religion, the Principles it inculcates, and its Fitneſs to render Men holy and humble here, and happily glorified hereafter.

WE cannot cloſe the delightful ſcene of the life of our dear Lord and Saviour more comfortably, than by conſidering the benefits reſulting therefrom to all who ſhall, by faith, receive and embrace the ſame.

Probably none have been greater enemies to the progreſs of Religion than thoſe who delineate it in a gloomy and terrifying form; nor any guilty of a more injurious calumny againſt the goſpel, than thoſe who repreſent its precepts as rigorous impoſitions and unneceſſary reſtraints.

True religion is the perfection of human nature, and the foundation of uniform exalted pleaſure: of public order and private happineſs. Chriſtianity is the moſt excellent and the moſt uſeful inſtitution, having the "promiſe of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." It is the voice of reaſon; it is alſo the

the language of ſcripture, "the ways of wiſdom are ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths are peace;" and our bleſſed Saviour himſelf aſſures us, that his precepts are eaſy, and the burden of his religion light.

The chriſtian religion is a rational ſervice, a worſhip "in ſpirit and truth," a worſhip worthy of the majeſty of the Almighty to receive, and of the nature of man to pay. It comprehends all we ought to believe, and all we ought to practice its poſitive rights are few, in plain and eaſy ſignificancy, and manifeſtly adapted to eſtabliſh a ſenſe of our obligations to God and Chriſt.

The goſpel places religion not in abſtruſe ſpeculation and metaphyſical ſubtleties; not in outward ſhew and tedious ceremony; not in ſuperſtitious auſterities and enthuſiaſtic viſions, but in purity of heart, and holineſs of life. The ſum of our duty, according to our great Maſter himſelf, conſiſts in the "love of God, and of our neighbour;" according to St. Paul, in denying ungodlineſs and worldly luſts; and in living ſoberly, righteouſly and godly in this preſent evil world; according to St. James, in viſiting the fatherleſs and widows in affliction, and in keeping ourſelves unſpotted from the world. This is the conſtant ſtrain and tenor of the goſpel. This it inculcates moſt earneſtly, and on this it lays the greateſt ſtreſs.

But is the chriſtian ſcheme only a republication of the law of nature, or merely a refined ſyſtem of morality? No, certainly; it is a great deal more. It is an act of grace, a ſtupendous plan of Providence, deſigned for the recovery of mankind from a ſtate of degradation and ruin, to the favour of the Almighty, and to the hopes of a happy immortality through a Mediator.

Under this diſpenſation, true religion conſiſts in a "repentance towards God, and in faith in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt," as the perſon appointed by the ſupreme authority of heaven and earth, to reconcile apoſtate man to his offended Creator, as a ſacrifice for ſin; our vital head, and governing Lord. This is religion, as we are Chriſtians. And what hardſhip, what exaction is there in all this? Surely none. Nay, the practice of religion is much eaſier than the ſervitude of ſin.

Our rational powers all will readily agree are impaired, and the ſoul weakened, by ſin. The animal paſſions are ſtrong, and apt to oppoſe

poſe the dictates of the Spirit of God: objects of ſenſe make powerful impreſſions on the mind. We are, in every ſituation, ſurrounded with many ſnares and temptations. In ſuch a diſordered ſtate of things, to maintain an undeviating path of duty, cannot be effected by poor weak man. There are, however, generous aids afforded us to perſevere in the ways of the Lord.

The gracious Author of nature has planted in the human breaſt a quick ſenſe of good and evil; a faculty which ſtrongly dictates right and wrong: and though by the ſtrength of appetite and warmth of paſſion, men are often hurried into immoral practices, yet in the beginning, eſpecially when there has been the advantage of a good education, it is uſually with reluctance and oppoſition of mind. What inward ſtruggles precede! What bitter pangs attend their ſinful exceſſes! What guilty bluſhes and uneaſy fears! What frightful proſpects and pale reviews! "Terrors are upon them, and a fire not blown conſumeth them. To make a mock at ſin," and to commit iniquity with remorſe, is an attainment that requires length of time, and much painful labour; more labour than is requiſite to attain that habitual goodneſs which is the glory of the man, the ornament of the chriſtian, and the chief of his happineſs.

The ſoul can no more be reconciled to acts of wickedneſs and injuſtice, than the body to exceſs, but by ſuffering many bitter pains, and cruel attacks,

The mouth of conſcience may, indeed, be ſtopped for a while, by falſe principles: its ſecret whiſpers may be drowned by the noiſe of company, and ſtifled by entertainments of ſenſe; but this principle of conſcience is ſo deeply rooted in human nature, and, at the ſame time, her voice is ſo clear and ſtrong, that the ſinners arts will be unable to lull her into a laſting ſecurity.

When the hour of calamity arrives: when ſickneſs ſeizeth, and death approaches the ſinner, conſcience now conſtrains him to liſten to her accuſations, and will not ſuffer the temples of his head to take any reſt. "There is no peace to the wicked;" the foundations of peace are ſubverted, they are at utter enmity with their reaſon, with their conſcience, and with their God.

Not ſo is the caſe of true religion. For when religion, pure and genuine, forms the tempers, and governs the

the life's conſcience applauds, and peace takes her reſidence in the breaſt. The ſoul is in its proper ſtate. There is order and regularity both in the faculties and actions. Conſcious of its own integrity, and ſecure of the divine approbation, the ſoul enjoys a calmneſs not to be deſcribed. But why do I call this happy frame calmneſs only? It is far more than mere calmneſs. The air may be calm, and the day overcaſt with thick miſts and dark clouds. The pious and virtuous mind reſembles a ſerene day, enlightened and enlivened with the brighteſt rays of the ſun. Though all without may be clouds and darkneſs, there is light in the heart of a pious man. "He is ſatisfied from himſelf, and is filled with peace and joy in believing." In the concluding ſcene, the awful moment of diſſolution, all is peaceful and ſerene. The immortal part quits its tenement of clay, with the well-grounded hopes of aſcending to happineſs and glory.

Nor does the goſpel enjoin any duty but what is fit and reaſonable. It calls upon all its profeſſors to practiſe reverence, ſubmiſſion, and gratitude to God; juſtice, truth, and univerſal benevolence to men: and to maintain the government of our own minds. And what has any one to object againſt this? From the leaſt to the greateſt commandment of our dear Redeemer, there is not one which impartial reaſon can find fault with. "His law is perfect; his precepts are true and righteous, altogether." (Not even thoſe excepted, which require us) to love our enemies, to deny ourſelves and to take up our croſs." To forgive an injury is more generous and manly than to revenge it: to controul a licentious appetite than to indulge it: to ſuffer poverty, reproach, and even death itſelf, in the ſacred cauſe of truth and integrity, is much wiſer and better, than, by baſe compliances, to make "ſhipwreck of faith and a good conſcience."

Thus in a ſtorm at ſea, or a conflagration on the land, a man with pleaſure abandons his lumber, to ſecure his jewels. Piety and virtue are the wiſeſt and moſt reaſonable things in the world; vice and wickedneſs the moſt irrational and abſurd.

The all-wiſe Author of our being hath ſo framed our natures, and placed us in ſuch relations, that there is nothing virtuous, but what is advantageous to our preſent intereſt,

reſt, both with reſpect to body and mind. Meekneſs and humility, patience and univerſal charity, and grace, give a joy "unknown to tranſgreſſors."

The divine virtues of truth and equity are the only bands of friendſhip, the only ſupports of ſociety. Temperance and ſobriety are the beſt preſervatives of health and ſtrength: but ſin and debauchery impair the body, conſume the ſubſtance, reduce to poverty, and form the direct path to an immature and untimely death. Now this is the chief excellency of all laws; and what will always render their burdens pleaſant and delightful is, that they enjoy nothing unbecoming or injurious.

Beſides, to render our duty eaſy, we have the example, as well as the commands, of the bleſſed Jeſus. The maſter of morality among the heathens gave excellent rules for the regulation of men's manners; but they wanted either the honeſty, or the courage to try their own arguments upon themſelves. It was a ſtrong preſumption, that the yoke of the Scribes and Phariſees was grievous, when they laid "heavy burdens upon men's ſhoulders," which they themſelves refuſed to touch with one of their fingers. Not thus our great law-giver, Jeſus Chriſt the righteous. His behaviour was, in all reſpects, conformable to his doctrine. His devotion towards God, how ſublime and ardent! benevolence towards men, how great and diffuſive! he was in his life an exact pattern of innocence; for he "did not ſin; neither was guile found in his mouth." In the Son of God incarnate is exhibited the brighteſt, the faireſt reſemblance of the Father that earth or heaven ever beheld, an example peculiarly perſuaſive, calculated to inſpire reſolution, and to animate us to uſe our utmoſt endeavours to imitate the divine pattern, the example of "the author and finiſher of our faith, of him who loved us, and gave himſelf for us." Our profeſſion and character, as chriſtians, oblige us to make this example the model of our lives. Every motive of decency, gratitude, and intereſt, conſtrain us to tread the paths he trod before us.

We ſhould alſo remember that our burden is eaſy; becauſe God, who "knoweth whereof we are made, who conſidereth that we are but duſt," is ever ready to aſſiſt us. The heathen ages themſelves had ſome

ſome notions of this aſſiſtance, tho' guided only by the glimmering lamp of reaſon. But what they looked upon as probable, the Goſpel clearly and ſtrongly aſſerts. We there hear the apoſtle exhorting. "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." We there hear the bleſſed Jeſus himſelf arguing in this convincing manner: "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more ſhall your heavenly Father give the holy ſpirit to them that aſk him?

I would not here be underſtood to mean, that the agency of the ſpirit is irreſiſtble, and lays a neceſſitating bias on all the faculties and affections. Were this the caſe, precepts and prohibitions, promiſes and threatenings, would ſignify nothing; and duty and obligation would be words without a meaning. The ſpirit aſſiſteth in a manner agreeable to the frame of human nature; not controuling the free uſe of reaſon, but by aſſiſting the underſtanding, influencing the will, and moderating the affections. But though we may not be able to explain the mode of his operations, the ſcriptures warrant us to aſſert, that when men are renewed and prepared for heaven, it is "through ſanctification of the ſpirit, and belief of the truth." How enlivening the thought! how encouraging the motive! We are not left to ſtruggle alone with the difficulties which attend the practice of virtue, in the preſent imperfect ſtate. The merciful Father of our ſpirit is ever near to help our infirmities, to enlighten the underſtanding, to ſtrengthen good reſolutions, and in concurrence with our own endeavours, to make us conquerors over all oppoſition. Faithful is he to his promiſes, and will not ſuffer the ſincere and well diſpoſed to be tempted above what they are able to bear. What can be deſired more than this? To promote the happineſs of his people, every thing is done that is requiſite, his grace is all-ſufficient, his ſpirit is able to conduct us through this vale of tears, to never-fading bliſs.

We ſhould alſo remember, that the great doctrine of the Goſpel, concerning the propitious mercy of God to all penitents, through Chriſt Jeſus, greatly contributes to the conſolation of Chriſtians. Let it be granted, that the hope of pardon is eſſential to the religion of fallen creatures, and one of its firſt princi-

ples, yet, conſidering the doubts and ſuſpicions which are apt to ariſe in a mind conſcious of guilt, it is undoubtedly a great, and ineſtimable favour, to be relieved in this reſpect, by a meſſenger from Omnipotence himſelf. This is our happineſs. We are not left to depend upon conſequential reaſonings, which the bulk of mankind are little uſed to; but we are aſſured, that upon our true repentance, we ſhall, "through the mediation of Chriſt, receive the full remiſſion of paſt ſins," and be reſtored to the ſame ſtate and favour with our Maker, as if we had never tranſgreſſed his laws. Here the Goſpel triumphs. With theſe aſſurances it abounds. Upon this head the declaration of our bleſſed Saviour and his Apoſtles are ſo expreſs and full, that every one who believes them, and knows himſelf to be a true penitent, muſt baniſh every doubt and fear, and rejoice with joy unſpeakable. "Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you reſt. *Matt.* xi. 28. "All manner of ſin and blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto men." *Matt.* xii. 31. "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveneſs of ſins; and by him all that believe are juſtified from all things, from which we could not be juſtified by the law of Moſes." *Acts* xiii. 38, 39. "The blood of Jeſus cleanſeth from all ſin." What grace and favour is this! Who can dwell upon the tranſporting theme too long! Now our way is plain before us, and the burden we are to bear is made eaſy. No ſins are unpardonable, if repented and forſaken.

Conſider this, all ye who have never yet regarded religion, but purſued a courſe of vice and ſenſuality all your lives long. Though your conduct has been baſe, to the laſt degree, your caſe is not deſperate. Far from it. The God whom you have ſo highly offended commiſſerates your errors, is ever ready to extend his pardoning mercy to his moſt degenerate creatures, upon their faith and repentance, and "is in Chriſt Jeſus reconciling the world to himſelf, not imputing unto penitent ſinners their treſpaſſes. Let the wicked, therefore forſake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." *Iſaiah* lv. 7.

Another

Another particular, which renders the chriſtian religion delightful is, its leading us to the perfect, eternal life of heaven. It cannot be denied but that we may draw from the light of nature ſtrong preſumptions of a future ſtate. The preſent exiſtence does not look like an entire ſcene, but rather like the infancy of human nature, which is capable of arriving at a much higher degree of maturity; but whatever ſolid foundation the doctrine of a future ſtate may have, in nature and reaſon, certain it is, through the habitual neglect of reflection, and the force of irregular paſſions, this doctrine was, before the coming of our bleſſed Saviour, very much diſfigured, and, in a great meaſure, loſt, among the ſons of men.

In the heathen world, a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments was a matter of mere ſpeculation and uncertainty, ſometimes hoped for, ſometimes doubted of, and ſometimes abſolutely denied. The law of Moſes, though of divine original, is chiefly enforced by promiſes of temporal bleſſings; and, even in the writings of the prophets, a future immortality is very ſparingly mentioned, and obſcurely repreſented: but the doctrine of our Saviour hath "brought life and immortality to light." In the goſpel we have a diſtinct account of another world, attended with many engaging circumſtances; about which the deciſions of reaſon were dark and confuſed. We have the teſtimony of the author of our religion, who was raiſed from the dead, and who afterwards, in the preſence of his diſciples, aſcended into heaven. In the New Teſtament it is expreſſly declared, that good men, "when abſent from the body, are preſent with the Lord." Here we are aſſured of the reſurrection of the body in a glorious form, clothed with immortal vigour, ſuited to the active nature of the animating ſpirit, and aſſiſting its moſt enlarged operations and inceſſant progreſs towards perfection. Here we are aſſured, that "the righteous ſhall go into life everlaſting;" that they ſhall enter into the kingdom of the heavenly Canaan, where no ignorance ſhall cloud the underſtanding, no vice diſturb the will. In theſe regions of perfection, nothing but love ſhall poſſeſs the ſoul; nothing but gratitude employ the tongue; there the righteous ſhall be united to an innumerable company of angels, and to the general aſſembly and church of

of the firſt born: there they ſhall ſee their exalted Redeemer, at the right hand of Omnipotence, and ſit down with him on his throne; there they ſhall be admitted into the immediate preſence of the ſupreme fountain of life and happineſs, and beholding his face, be changed into the ſame image, from glory to glory. Here language—here imagination fails me! It requires the genius, the knowledge, and the pen of an angel, to paint the happineſs, the bliſsful ſcene of the New Jeruſalem, which human eyes cannot behold, till this mortal body ſhall be purified from its corruption, and dreſſed in the robes of immortality: "eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart to conceive, the joys which God hath prepared for them that love him."

What is the heaven of the heathens, compared with the heaven of the chriſtians? The hope, the proſpect of this, is ſufficient to reconcile us to all the difficulties that may attend our progreſs, ſweeten all our labours, alleviate every grief, and ſilence every murmur.

But why, ſays the libertine in the gaiety of his heart, ſhould there be any difficulties, or reſtraint, at all? God hath made nothing in vain. The appetites he hath planted in the human breaſt are to be gratified. To deny or reſtrain them, is ignominous bondage; but to give full ſcope to every deſire and paſſion of the heart, without check or controul, is true manly freedom.

In oppoſition to this looſe and careleſs way of reaſoning, let it be conſidered, that the liberty of a rational creature doth not conſiſt in an entire exemption from all controul, but in following the dictates of reaſon, as the governing principle, and in keeping the various paſſions in due ſubordination. To follow the regular notion of thoſe affections which the wiſe Creator hath implanted within us, is our duty: but as our natural deſires, in this ſtate of trial, are often irregular, we are bound to reſtrain their exceſſes, and not to indulge them, but in a ſtrict ſubſerviency to the integrity and peace of our minds, and to the order and happineſs of human ſociety eſtabliſhed in the world. Thoſe who allow the ſupreme command to be uſurped by ſenſual and brutal appetites, may promiſe themſelves liberties, but are truly and abſolutely the ſervants of corruption. To be vicious, is to be enſlaved. We behold with pity thoſe miſerable objects that are chained

chained in the gallies, or confined in dark priſons and loathſome dungeons; but much more abject and vile is the ſlavery of the ſinner! No ſlavery of the body is equal to the bondage of the mind: no chains preſs ſo cloſely, or gall ſo cruelly, as the fetters of ſin, which corrode the very ſubſtance of the ſoul, and fret every faculty.

It muſt, indeed be confeſſed, that there are ſome profligates, ſo hardened by cuſtoms, as to be paſt all feeling; and, becauſe inſenſible of their bondage, boaſt of this inſenſibility as a mark of their native freedom, and of their happineſs. Vain men! they might extol, with equal propriety, the peculiar happineſs of an apoplexy, or the profound tranquillity of a lethargy.

Thus have we endeavoured to place, in a plain and conſpicuous light, ſome of the peculiar excellencies of the chriſtian religion; and, from hence, many uſeful reflections will naturally ariſe in the mind of every attentive reader. It is the religion of Jeſus that hath removed idolatry and ſuperſtition, and brought immortality to light, when concealed under a veil of darkneſs almoſt impenetrable. This hath ſet the great truths of religion in a clear and conſpicuous point of view, and propoſed new and powerful motives to influence our minds, and to determine our conduct. Nothing is enjoined to be believed, but what is worthy of God, nothing to be practiſed but what is friendly to man. All the doctrines of the Goſpel are rational and conſiſtent; all its precepts are truly wiſe, juſt, and good. The Goſpel contains nothing grievous to an ingenuous mind: it debars us from nothing, but doing harm to ourſelves, or to our fellow-creatures; and permits us to range any where, but in the paths of danger and deſtruction. It only requires us to act up to its excellent commands, and to prefer to the vaniſhing pleaſure of ſin, the ſmiles of a reconciled God, and an eternal weight of glory. And is this a rigorous exaction, a heavy burden not to be endured? How can ſinful mortals harbour ſo unworthy a thought?

Surely no man who is a real friend to the cauſe of virtue, and to the intereſt of mankind, can ever be an enemy to Chriſtianity, if he truly underſtands it, and ſeriouſly reflects on its wiſe and uſeful tendency. It conducteth us to our journey's end, by the plaineſt and ſecureſt path; where the "ſteps are

not ſtraightened, and where he that runneth ſtumbleth not." Let us who live under this laſt, and moſt gracious diſpenſation of God to mankind, "count all things but loſs, for the excellency of the knowledge of Chriſt Jeſus our Lord; (and not ſuffer ourſelves, by the ſlight cavils of unbelievers, to be moved away from the hope of the Goſpel." Let us demonſtrate that we believe the ſuperior excellency of the chriſtian diſpenſation, by conforming to its precepts. Let us ſhew that we are chriſtians in deed, and in truth; not by endleſs diſputes about trifles, and the tranſports of a blind zeal, but by abounding in thoſe "fruits of righteouſneſs, which are, through Chriſt, to the praiſe and glory of God."

From what has been ſaid, we may clearly perceive how groundleſs all thoſe prejudices are, which ſome conceive againſt religion, as if it was a peeviſh, moroſe ſcheme, burdenſome to human nature, and inconſiſtent with the true enjoyment of life. Such ſentiments are too apt to prevail in the heat of youth, when the ſpirits are briſk and lively, and the paſſions warm and impetuous; but it is wholly a miſtake, and a miſtake of the moſt dangerous tendency. The truth is, there is no pleaſure like that of a good conſcience: no real peace but what reſults from a ſenſe of the Divine favour. This enables the mind, and can alone ſupport it under all the various and unequal ſcenes of the preſent ſtate of trial. This lays a ſure foundation of an eaſy, comfortable life, of a ſerene, peaceful death, and of eternal joy and happineſs hereafter; whereas vice is ruinous to all our moſt valuable intereſts; ſpoils the native beauty, and ſubverts the order of the ſoul; renders us the ſcorn of man, the rejected of God, and, without timely repentance, will rob us of a happy eternity. Religion is the health, the liberty, and the happineſs of the Soul; ſin is the diſeaſe, the ſervitude, and deſtruction of it.

If this be not ſufficient to convince you, let me lead you into the chamber of an habitual rioter, the lewd debauchee, worn out in the cauſe of iniquity, his bones full of the ſin of his youth, that from his own mouth, as he lies on his expiring bed, you may learn that the way of tranſgreſſion is hard: and that, however ſweet ſin may be in the commiſſion, it ſtrikes like a ſerpent, and bites like an adder.

I

I am going, reader, to represent to you the last moments of a person of high birth and spirit; of great parts and strong passions; every way accomplished, but unhappily attached to those paths which lead to vice and destruction.

His unkind treatment was the death of a most amiable wife: and his monstrous extravagance, in effect, disinherited his only child. And surely the death-bed of a profligate, is next in horror to that abyss to which it leads. It has the most of hell that is visible upon earth, and he that has seen it has more than faith to confirm him in his creed. I see it now, says the worthy divine, from whom I shall borrow this relation; for who can forget it? Are there in it no flames and furies?—You are ignorant then of what a scared imagination can figure! what a guilty heart can feel! How dismal is it! The two great enemies of soul and body, sickness and sin, sink and confound his friends; silence and darkness are the dismal scene. Sickness excludes the light of heaven, and sin its blessed hope. Oh, double darkness! more than Egptian! acutely to be felt!

The sad evening before the death of that noble youth, whose last hours suggested these thoughts, I was with him. No one was there but his physician, and an intimate acquaintance, whom he loved, and whom he had ruined. At my coming, he said.

"You and the physician are come too late.—I have neither life nor hope. You both aim at miracles. You would raise the dead."

Heaven, I said, was merciful.

"Or I could not, answered he, have been thus guilty. What has it not done to bless, and to save me? I have been too strong for Omnipotence. I plucked down ruin."

I said, the blessed Redeemer.—

"Hold, hold, said he, you wound me! This is the rock on which I have split! I denied his name."

Refusing to hear any thing from me, or take any thing from the physician, he lay silent, as far as sudden darts of pain would permit, till the clock struck. Then he cried out with vehemence. "Oh time! time! It is fit thou shouldst thus strike thy murderer to the heart.—How art thou fled, for ever?—A month?—Oh, for a single week! I ask not for years, though an age were too little for the much I have to do."

On my saying, We could not do

too

too much; that heaven was a bleſſed place!

"So much the worſe, replied he, 'tis loſt! 'tis loſt!—Heaven is to me the ſevereſt part of hell?"

Soon after I propoſed prayer. To which he anſwered,

"Pray you that can; I never prayed. I cannot pray.—Nor need I. Heaven is on my ſide already. It cloſes with my conſcience. Its ſevereſt ſtrokes but ſecond my own."

His friend, being much touched, even to tears, at this (for who could forbear? I could not) with a moſt affectionate look, ſaid.

"Keep theſe tears for thyſelf, I have undone thee—Doſt thou weep for me? That's cruel. What can pain me more?"

Here his friend, too much affected, would have left him.

No, ſaid he, ſtay. You ſtill may hope;—therefore, hear me. How madly have I talked?——How madly haſt thou liſtened and believed? But look on my preſent ſtate, as a full anſwer, to thee and to myſelf. This body is all weakneſs and pain: but my ſoul, as if flung up by torment, to greater ſtrength and ſpirit, is full powerful to reaſon: full mighty to ſuffer. And that which thus triumphs within the jaws of mortality, is doubtleſs immortal. And as for a Deity, nothing leſs than an Almighty could inflict the pains I feel."

I was about to congratulate this paſſive, involuntary confeſſion, in his aſſerting the two prime articles of his creed, extorted by the rack of nature; when he thus very paſſionately added,

"No, no! let me ſpeak on. I have not long to ſpeak.—My much injured friend! My ſoul, as my body, lies in ruins; in ſcattered fragments of broken thought; remorſe for the paſt, throws my thoughts on the future. Worſe dread of the future ſtrikes it back on the paſt. I turn, and turn, and find no reſt. Didſt thou feel half the mountain that is on me, thou wouldſt ſtruggle with the Martyr for his ſtake, and bleſs heaven for the flame;—that is not an everlaſting flame: that is not an unquenchable fire."

How were we ſtruck? yet, ſoon after, ſtill more. With what an eye of diſtraction; what a face of deſpair he cried out, "my principles have poiſoned my friend; my extravagance hath beggared my boy: my unkindneſs has murdered my wife!—And is there another hell? Oh! thou blaſphemed, yet moſt indulgent

dulgent Lord God! Hell itſelf is a refuge if it hide me from thy frown."

Soon after his underſtanding failed; his terrified imagination uttered horrors not to be repeated, or ever forgotten; and before the ſun (which I hope has ſeen few like him) aroſe, this gay, young, noble, ingenious, accompliſhed, and moſt wretched mortal, expired.

It muſt, indeed, be owned it ſometimes happens, that men who have led very wicked lives, have gone out of the world, as they have lived in it, defying conſcience, and deriding a future judgment as an idle fiction; but theſe inſtances are very rare, and only prove that there are monſters in the moral, as well as in the natural world.

It will perhaps be ſaid, that the ſons of vice and riot have pleaſure in ſenſual indulgences. Allowed; but it is altogether of the lower kind, empty, fleeting, and tranſient; "like the cracking of thorns under a pot, ſo is the mirth of the wicked." It makes a noiſe and a blaze, for the preſent; but ſoon vaniſhes away into ſmoak and vapour.

On the other hand, the pleaſure of religion is ſolid and laſting: and will attend us through all, even the laſt ſtages of life. When we have paſſed the levity of youth, and have loſt our reliſh for the gay entertainments of ſenſe; when old age ſteals upon us, and ſtoops us towards the grave, this will cleave faſt to us, and give us relief. It will be ſo far from terminating at death, that it then commences perfect, and continually improves, with new additions.

Clad in this immortal robe, we need not fear the awful ſummons of the king of terrors, nor regret our retiring into the chambers of the duſt. Our immortal part will wing its way to the arms of its Omnipotent Redeemer, and find reſt in the heavenly manſions of the Almighty. And though our earthly part, this tabernacle of clay, returns to its original duſt, and is diſſolved, our joy, our conſolation, our confidence is, that "we have a building of God, a houſe not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens."

THE LIVES OF THE APOSTLES.

Saint PETER.

CHAP. I.

Account of the Life of St. Peter, prior to his Call to the Apoſtleſhip of the bleſſed Jeſus.

ST. Peter was born at Bethſaida, a city of Galilee, ſituate on the banks of the lake of Geneſareth, called alſo the ſea of Galilee, from its being ſituated in that country; and the lake of Tiberias, from that city being built on its banks. The particular time of this great apoſtle's birth cannot be known; the evangeliſts, and other writers among the primitive chriſtians, having been ſilent with regard to this particular. It is, however, pretty certain, that he was at leaſt ten years older than his maſter; the circumſtances of his being married, and in a ſettled courſe of life, when he firſt became a follower of the great Meſſiah, and that authority and reſpect the gravity of his perſon procured him among the reſt of the apoſtles, ſufficiently declare this conjecture to be very near the truth.

As he was a deſcendant of Abraham, he was ~~crucified~~ *circumciſed* according to the rites of the Moſaic law, and called by his parents Simon or Simeon, a name common at that time, among the Jews. But after his becoming a diſciple of the bleſſed Jeſus, the additional title of Cephas, was

was conferred upon him by his Maſter, to denote the firmneſs of his faith: the word, in the Syriac, the common language of the Jews, at that time, ſignifying a Stone, or Rock; and thence he is called, in Greek, *Petros*, and by us Peter, which implies the ſame thing.

With regard to the parents of St. Peter, the evangeliſts have alſo been ſilent, except in telling us that his father's name was Jonah, who was highly honoured by our bleſſed Saviour, who choſe two of his ſons, Andrew and Peter, to be his apoſtles, and preachers of the glad tidings of ſalvation to the children of men.

St. Peter, in his youth, was brought up to the trade of fiſhing, on the lake of Bethſaida, famous for different kinds of fiſh, which excelled all others in the fineneſs of their taſte.

Here he followed his trade of fiſhing, but afterwards removed to Capernaum where he ſettled; for we find he had a houſe there when our Saviour began his public miniſtry, and there had paid tribute. Nicephorus tells us that Helen, the mother of Conſtantine, erected a beautiful church over the ruins of St. Peter's houſe, in honour of that apoſtle.

Capernaum was as well ſituated as Bethſaida, for carrying on his trade, ſtanding at the influx of the Jordan into the ſea of Galilee, and where he might, with equal advantage, reap the fruit of an honeſt and induſtrious diligence. The buſineſs of Peter was both mean and ſervile; it expoſed him to all injuries of the weather, the tempeſtuouſneſs of the ſea, and the darkneſs and horror of the night, and all to acquire a mean livelihood for himſelf and family. But meanneſs of worldly degree is no obſtacle to the favour of God; nay, if we review the ſtate of Chriſtianity, from its riſe to the preſent period, we ſhall find that its friends and votaries conſiſt rather of perſons of humble and lowly ſtations of life, than of the great, the dignified, and the opulent.

And herein are manifeſted the wiſe and admirable methods uſed by Divine Providence, in making choice of ſuch mean and unlikely inſtruments, in planting and propagating the chriſtian religion in the world.—Men who were deſtitute of every advantage of education, and brought up to the meaneſt employments, were choſen to confound the wiſe, and overthrow the learning of the

prudent.

prudent. Such were the perſons whom the Almighty ſent to propagate the religion of his Son; to ſilence the wiſe, the ſcribe, and the diſputer of this world, and to make fooliſh the wiſdom of the earth.—For though the Jews required a ſign, and the Greeks ſought after wiſdom; though the preaching of a crucified Saviour was a ſcandal to the former, and fooliſhneſs to the learned latter: yet, by this fooliſhneſs of preaching, God was pleaſed to ſave them that believed: and in the event made it appear, that, "the fooliſhneſs of God is wiſer than man, and the weakneſs of God is ſtronger than men." That ſo the honour of all may redound to himſelf, "that no fleſh ſhould glory in his preſence, but that he that glorieth ſhould glory in the Lord."

CHAP. II.

The Manner by which Peter arrives to the Knowledge of the bleſſed Jeſus, and of his Call to the Diſcipleſhip.

SACRED hiſtory hath not aſcertained of what ſect the apoſtle was. We know, indeed, that his brother Andrew was a follower of that preacher of repentance: and it is very unlikely that he, who was ready to carry his brother the early tidings of the Meſſiah, that the ſun of righteouſneſs was already riſen in thoſe parts, ſhould not be equally ſolicitous to bring him under the diſcipline and influence of John the Baptiſt, the day-ſtar which appeared to uſher in the appearance of the Son of God. Beſides, Peter's great readineſs and curioſity at the firſt news of Chriſt's appearing to come to him and converſe with him, ſhews, that his expectations had been awakened, and ſome glimmering rays of hope conveyed to him by the preaching and miniſtry of John, who was "the voice of one crying in the wilderneſs, prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths ſtrait."

He became acquainted with the immaculate Lamb of God, in the following manner; The bleſſed Jeſus, having ſpent thirty years in the ſolitude of a private life, had lately been babtized by John in Jordan, and there owned by the ſolemn atteſtation of heaven to be the Son of God; whereupon he was immediately hurried into the Wilderneſs, and there for thirty days maintained a perſonal conteſt with the devil. But having conquered this great enemy of mankind, he returned to "Bethabara beyond Jordan," where John was baptizing his proſelytes, and

and endeavouring to anſwer the Jews who had ſent deputations to him to enquire concerning this new Meſſiah that appeared among them. To ſatisfy theſe curious enquiries of Iſrael, John faithfully related every thing he knew concerning him, gave him the greateſt character, and ſoon after pointed him out to his diſciples; upon which two of them preſently followed the great Redeemer of mankind, one of which was Andrew Simon's brother.

Nor did he conceal the joyful diſcovery he had made; for early in the morning he haſtened to acquaint his brother Simon that he had found the Meſſiah. It is not enough to be happy alone; grace is a communicative principle, that, like the circles in the water, delights to multiply itſelf, and to diffuſe its influences all around, eſpecially on thoſe whom nature has placed neareſt to us. I have, ſaid he, with rapture to his brother, found that eminent perſon ſo long and ſignally foretold by the prophets, and whom all the devout and pious among the ſons of Jacob ſo earneſtly expected.

Simon, who was one of thoſe that waited for redemption in Iſrael, raviſhed with this joyful news, and impatient of delay, preſently followed his brother to the place; and on his arrival, our bleſſed Saviour immediately gave him a proof of his divinity; ſaluting him at firſt ſight by his name, and telling him both who he was, his name, and kindred, and what title ſhould ſoon be conferred upon him.

But whether theſe two ſons of Jonah conſtantly attended in perſon, from that time, on the great Redeemer of mankind, and became his diſciples, the ſacred hiſtory is ſilent. It is, however, probable, that they ſtayed with him ſome time till they were inſtructed in the firſt rudiments of his doctrine; and then by the leave of their great and benevolent Maſter, returned to their families and to their callings; for it is reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that the bleſſed Jeſus was not at this time willing to waken the jealouſy of the rulers of Iſrael, and the ſuſpicion of the Romans, by a numerous retinue, and therefore diſmiſſed his diſciples, and among the reſt, Andrew and Peter, who returned to their trade of fiſhing on the lake, and where our bleſſed Redeemer afterwards found them.

The holy Jeſus had now more than a year entered on his public miniſtry, going into every part of

the country, to ſeek opportunities of doing good to the children of men; ſo that by the conſtancy of his preaching, and the reputation of his miracles, his fame was ſpread throughout all Judea; and multitudes of people flocked to him from all parts, to hear his doctrine, and be ſpectators of his mighty works.

But to avoid this prodigious throng of people, our great Redeemer often retired to ſome ſolitary place, to indulge the privacies of contemplation. In one of theſe retreats, on the banks of the ſea of Galilee, the multitude found him out, and ran to him from the city. Our Saviour, therefore, to avoid the crowd, ſtepped into a fiſhing-boat, which lay near ſhore and belonged to Simon Peter, who, together with his companions, were on ſhore drying their nets, after an unſucceſsful night ſpent in toil and labour. The bleſſed Jeſus, who might have commanded, was pleaſed to intreat Peter, who now returned to his boat, to thruſt off a little from the land, that he might inſtruct the people, who were gathered in prodigious crowds on the border of the lake.

Peter gladly complied with the requeſt of his Maſter, who delivered his heavenly doctrine to the people on the ſhore. As ſoon as he had ended his diſcourſe, he reſolved to ſeal it with a miracle, that the people might be perſuaded he was a teacher come from God. Accordingly, he ordered Simon to row farther from the ſhore, and caſt his net into the ſea. To which Simon anſwered, that they had laboured the preceding night, and had taken nothing; and, if they could not ſucceed, there was little hopes of it now, as the day was far leſs proper for fiſhing, than the night. But as his Maſter was pleaſed to command, he would obey! and according he let down his net, when, to the aſtoniſhment both of him and his companions, ſo great a multitude of fiſhes were incloſed, that they were obliged to call their partners to their aſſiſtance. Amazed at this miraculous draught of fiſhes, Simon Peter, in an extaſy of admiration, blended with awe and humility, fell proſtrate at his Maſter's feet, acknowledging himſelf a vile and ſinful perſon, and thinking himſelf unworthy of being admitted into the preſence of a perſon ſo immediately ſent from God. But the compaſſionate Son of the Moſt High kindly removed his fears; telling him that this miracle was wrought to confirm his faith,

faith, and indicate to him that the Almighty had appointed a more noble employment for him, that of saving the souls of the children of men.

From this time Peter and his companions became the inseparable and constant disciples of the great Messiah, living under the rules of his discipline and institutions.

Soon after, our blessed Saviour returned to Capernaum with his disciples, where they found the mother-in-law of Peter dangerously ill of a fever. But the compassionate Jesus, who never omitted any opportunity of doing good to the human race, checked the disease, and taking her by the hand, restored her in a moment to her former health; demonstrating at once his power and willingness to relieve the sons and daughters of affliction.

CHAP. III.

Peculiar Transgressions of this Apostle, from the time of his being Elected, to the last Passover of his Blessed Master.

THE blessed Jesus, having entered upon his important mission, thought proper to elect some peculiar persons from among his followers, to be constant witnesses of his miracles and doctrines, and who, after his departure, might be intrusted with the care of building his church, and planting that religion in the world for which he himself left the mansions of heaven, and put on the veil of immortality. In order to this, he withdrew privately, in the evening, to a solitary mountain, where he spent the night in solemn addresses to his Almighty Father, for rendering the great work he was going to undertake prosperous and successful.

Early the next morning the disciples came to him, out of whom he made choice of twelve to be his apostles, and the constant attendants on his person.

These he afterwards invested with the power of working miracles, and sent them into different parts of Judea, in order to carry on with more rapidity the great work which he himself had so happily begun.

All the Evangelists, in their enumeration of these apostles, constantly place St. Peter first. But we must not on that account suppose that St. Peter was invested with any personal prerogative above his brethren; none of them ever intimated any such thing, and St. Paul says expressly, that he himself was not inferior to the very chiefest apostle.

Soon

Soon after the election, the bleſſed Jeſus, attended by Peter and the two ſons of Zebedee, followed Jairus, a ruler of the ſynagogue, to his houſe, in order to reſtore his daughter, an only child, who lay at the point of death; but before their arrival, a meſſenger brought news that the damſel was dead, and therefore it was unneceſſary for our Saviour to give himſelf further trouble. But our Saviour bid the ruler not deſpair; for if he believed, his daughter ſhould yet be reſtored to her former health. Accordingly, on his arrival, he took the maid by the hand, and with the power of a word, recalled her fleeting ſpirit, which had quitted its earthly tabernacle, and reſtored her again to life and health.

We have no farther account of St. Peter in particular, till the night after our Saviour's miraculouſly feeding the multitude in the wilderneſs. Jeſus had ordered his diſciples to take ſhip and paſs over to the other ſide, while he ſent the multitude away. But a violent ſtorm ariſing, they were in the moſt imminent danger of their lives, when their great Maſter came unto them, walking on the ſurface of the boiſterous billows, with the ſame eaſe as if it had been dry ground.

At his approach the diſciples were greatly terrified, ſuppoſing they had ſeen a ſpirit. But their compaſſionate Maſter ſoon diſpelled their fears, by telling them it was he himſelf, and therefore they had no reaſon to be terrified.

Peter, who was always remarkable for bold reſolutions, deſired his Maſter to give him leave to come to him on the water; and on obtaining permiſſion, he left the ſhip, and walked on the ſea, to meet his Saviour. But when he heard the deep roar around him, and the waves increaſe, he began to be afraid; and as his faith declined, his body ſunk in the water; ſo that in the greateſt agony he called for aſſiſtance to him who was able to ſave. Nor was his cry in vain; the compaſſionate Redeemer of mankind ſtretched out his hand, and again placed him on the ſurface of the water, with this gentle reproof, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didſt thou doubt?" And no ſooner was the bleſſed Jeſus and his diſciples entered into the ſhip, than the winds ceaſed, the waves ſubſided, and the ſhip was at the land whither they were going.

A miracle of this kind could not fail of aſtoniſhing the diſciples, and convincing them of the divinity of

of his miſſion; accordingly they drew near and worſhipped him with this confeſſion, "Of a truth thou art the ſon of God."

The next day our bleſſed Saviour entered the ſynagogue of Capernaum; and from the miracle of the loaves took occaſion to diſcourſe concerning himſelf as the true manna, and the "bread which came down from heaven;" opening to them the more ſublime and ſpiritual myſteries of the goſpel. On this, great part of the audience, who expected he was going to erect a temporal kingdom, and re-eſtabliſh the throne of David in Jeruſalem, offended at his repreſenting his dominion as entirely ſpiritual, departed from him, and came no more to hear his diſcourſes. Jeſus, on beholding this defection, turned himſelf towards his diſciples, and aſked them whether they alſo would go away? To which Peter replied, "Lord, whither ſhall we go? Thou haſt the words of eternal life: to whom ſhould we apply for life and ſalvation; thou art the way, the truth, and the light."

The inhabitants of Judea, who beheld with aſtoniſhment the miracles wrought by the bleſſed Jeſus, had formed many conjectures concerning him. Our great Redeemer was not ignorant of this; but being willing to hear what account his diſciples would give of the various opinions of the people, aſked them what the world ſaid concerning him? To which they replied, that ſome took him for John the Baptiſt riſen from the dead; ſome thought him to be Elias, and others Jeremiah, or one of the old prophets. He aſked them, what they themſelves thought of him? To which Peter, in the name of the reſt, anſwered, "thou art Chriſt, the Son of the living God," anointed and ſet apart by the Moſt High, to be the great King, Prieſt and Prophet of Iſrael.

This full and comprehenſive declaration of Peter ſatisfied the enquiry of our bleſſed Saviour, who anſwered, "Bleſſed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah; for fleſh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." That is, this faith which thou haſt now confeſſed is not human, or built upon the teſtimony of man, but upon that knowledge which I was ſent from God to reveal unto the world: therefore, I ſay alſo unto thee, "that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell ſhall not prevail

vail againſt it." As thy name ſignifies a rock, ſo ſhall thou prove firm, ſolid and immoveable in building my church, which ſhall be ſo firmly eſtabliſhed by thy care and diligence upon that faith thou haſt now profeſſed, that all the aſſaults of men and devils ſhall not be able to deſtroy it.

The diſciples had no idea that their Maſter was to ſuffer death for the ſins of the world; on the contrary, they conſidered him as immortal, having imbibed the opinion of the Scribes and Phariſees, "that Chriſt abideth for ever:" ſo that when the bleſſed Jeſus told them of the ſufferings he muſt undergo at Jeruſalem, what affronts and indignities he muſt ſuffer, and be at laſt put to death with all the acts of torture and diſgrace by a ſentence of the Jewiſh Sanhedrim, Peter, who could not endure the thought of his Maſter's ſuffering even the leaſt puniſhment, much leſs thoſe cruelties he had mentioned, and at laſt death itſelf, interrupted him very unſeaſonably, and ſaid, "Be it far from thee, Lord, this ſhall not be unto thee." He conſidered theſe ſufferings as inconſiſtent with the character of the great Meſſiah, whom he expected would reſtore the ſplendor of the throne of David his father, and reduce all the kingdoms of the earth to his obedience. But our bleſſed Saviour, who came down from heaven to give his life a ranſom for the ſins of the world, and who valued the redemption of mankind infinitely more than his own eaſe and ſafety, highly reſented this ſpeech of St. Peter, and accordingly returned this ſharp reproof. "Get thou behind me, Satan, thou art an offence to me." Thy pernicious counſel, in ſeeking to oppoſe the deſign for which I purpoſely left the courts of heaven, are offenſive: and thou "ſavoureſt not the things of God, but thoſe that be of men."

Some time after the great Redeemer of the ſouls of men, being to receive a ſpecimen of his future glorification, took with him three of his moſt intimate apoſtles, Peter, and the two ſons of Zebedee, and went up into a very high mountain, and while they were employed in earneſt addreſſes to the Almighty, he was tranſfigured before them, darting ſuch luſtre from his face, as exceeded the meridian rays of the ſun in brightneſs; and ſuch beams of light iſſued from his garments, as exceeded the light of the cleareſt day: an event and ſenſible repreſentation

tation of that ſtate, when the "juſt ſhall walk in white robes, and ſhine as the ſun in the kingdom of their Father." During this heavenly ſcene, the great prophets Moſes and Elias appeared in all the brightneſs and majeſty of a glorified ſtate, familiarly converſing with him, and diſcourſing of the death and ſufferings he was ſhortly to undergo, and his aſcenſion to the heavenly regions of bliſs and happineſs.

In the mean time Peter, and the two apoſtles, were fallen aſleep. But on their awaking were ſtrangely ſurprized to ſee their Lord ſurrounded with ſo much glory, and thoſe two great perſons converſing with him. They, however, remained ſilent till thoſe viſitants from the courts of heaven were going to depart, when Peter, in rapture and extaſy of mind, addreſſed himſelf to his Maſter, declaring their infinite pleaſure and delight in being favoured with this glorious ſpectacle; and deſired his leave to erect three tabernacles, one for him, one for Moſes, and one for Elias. But, while he was ſpeaking, a bright cloud overſhadowed thoſe two great prophets, and a voice came from it, uttering theſe remarkable words, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleaſed, hear ye him."

On which the apoſtles were ſeized with the utmoſt conſternation, and fell upon their faces to the ground; but Jeſus touching them, bid them diſmiſs their fears, and look up with confidence; they immediately obeyed, but ſaw their Maſter only.

After this heavenly ſcene, our bleſſed Lord travelled through Galilee, and at his return to Capernaum, the tax-gatherers came to Peter, and aſked him, whether his Maſter was not obliged to pay tribute? When our bleſſed Saviour was informed of this demand, rather than give offence, he wrought a miracle to pay it. Our great Redeemer was now going, for the laſt time, to Jeruſalem; and he ordered two of his diſciples, probably Peter and John, to fetch him an aſs that he might enter into the city on it, as had been foretold. The diſciples obeyed their Maſter, and brought the aſs to Jeſus, who being mounted thereon, entered the city amidſt the hoſannahs of a numerous multitude, with palm-branches in their hands, proclaiming at once both the majeſty of a prince, and the triumph of a Saviour.

CHAP. IV.

Life of St. Peter, from the Time of the Celebration of the laſt Paſſover, to the Crucifixion of the great Redeemer.

THE

THE bleſſed Jeſus proceeded from Jeruſalem to Bethany, from whence he ſent two of his diſciples, Peter and John, to make preparations for his celebrating the paſſover.

Every thing being ready, our bleſſed Saviour and his apoſtles entered the houſe, and ſat down to table. But their great Maſter, who often taught them by example as well as precept, aroſe from his ſeat, laid aſide his upper garment, took the towel, and pouring water into a baſon, began to waſh his diſciples feet, to teach them humility and charity by his own example. But on his coming to Peter, he would by no means admit his Maſter to perform ſo mean and condeſcending an office. What! the Son of God ſtoop to waſh the feet of a ſinful mortal! A thought which ſhocked the apoſtle, who ſtrenuouſly declared, "Thou ſhalt never waſh my feet." But the bleſſed Jeſus told him, that if he waſhed him not, he could have no part with him; inſinuating, that this action was myſtical, and ſignified the remiſſion of ſins, and the purifying virtue of the ſpirit of the Moſt High, to be poured upon all true Chriſtians. This anſwer ſufficiently removed the ſcruples of Peter, who cried out, "Lord, not my feet only, but alſo my hands and my head." Waſh me in every part, rather than let me loſe my portion in thee.

The bleſſed Jeſus, having ſet them this pattern of humility, began to reflect on his approaching ſufferings, and on the perſon who ſhould betray him into the hands of wicked and cruel men, telling them, that not a ſtranger, or an enemy, but one of his friends, one of his apoſtles, and even one of them who then ſat at table with him, would betray him.

This declaration exceedingly affected them all in general, and Peter in particular, who made ſigns to St. John, then lying on the boſom of his beloved Maſter, to aſk him particularly who it was? Jeſus complied with this requeſt, and gave them to underſtand that it was Judas Iſcariot.

Our great Redeemer now began the inſtitution of his ſupper, that great and ſolemn inſtitution, which he reſolved to leave behind him, to be conſtantly celebrated in his church, as a ſtanding monument of his love in dying for mankind; telling them, at the ſame time, that he himſelf was now going to leave them, and that "whither he went, they could not

not come." Peter, not well understanding what he meant, asked him, whither he was going? To which our great Redeemer replied, that he was going to that place whither he could not now, but should hereafter follow him: intimating the martyrdom he was to suffer for his Master's religion. Peter answered, that he was ready now to follow him, even if it required him to lay down his life. This confident presumption was not at all agreeable to the blessed Jesus, who told him he had promised great things, but would be so far from performing them, that before "the cock crew twice," that is, before three in the morning, he would thrice deny his Master.

Supper being now ended, they sung an hymn, and departed to the Mount of Olives: where Jesus again put them in mind how greatly the things he was going to suffer would offend them. To which Peter replied, that "though all men should be offended, because of him, yet he himself would never be offended." How far will an indiscreet zeal and affection transport even a good man into vanity and presumption! Peter questions the fidelity of others, but never doubts his own: though his Lord had just before reproved him for his self-sufficiency. This confidence of Peter inspired the rest of the apostles with courage; so that they declared their constant and unshaken adherence to their Master.

They now repaired to the garden of Gethsemane; and leaving the rest of the apostles near the entrance, our blessed Saviour taking with him Peter, James and John, retired into the most solitary parts of the garden, to enter on the preparatory scene of the great tragedy that was now approaching.

Here the blessed Jesus laboured under the bitterest agony that ever human nature suffered, during which he prayed with the utmost fervency to his Father, "offering up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood, falling down to the ground." While our great Redeemer was thus interceding with the Almighty, his three disciples were fallen asleep, though he had made three several visits to them, and calling to Peter, asked him, If he could not watch one hour with him? advising them all to watch and pray, that they might not enter into temptation, adding, "The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak."

What incomparable ſweetneſs! what generous candour did the Redeemer of mankind diſplay on this occaſion! He paſſed the moſt charitable cenſure upon an action, which malice and ill-nature would have painted in colours as black as the ſhades of darkneſs.

The diſciples were drowned in a profound ſecurity, and were buried in a deep ſleep, and though often awaked and informed of the approaching tragedy, they little regarded the admonitions, as if nothing but eaſe and ſoftneſs engaged their thoughts; an action which ſeemed to imply the moſt amazing ingratitude, and the higheſt diſregard for their Lord and Maſter.

But he who was compaſſion itſelf, would not impute it to their want of affection, or diſregard for his ſafety: he conſidered it merely as the effect of their infirmities, and made an excuſe for them, when they could make none for themſelves; teaching us the uſeful leſſon of putting the moſt favourable conſtruction on the actions of others: and to imitate the bee, and not the ſpider, by ſucking honey, inſtead of poiſon, from the various tranſactions of human life.

While he was diſcourſing with them, a band of ſoldiers, from the chief prieſts and elders, preceded by the traitor Judas to conduct and direct them, ruſhed into the garden, and ſeized the great high-prieſt of our profeſſion. Peter, whoſe ungovernable zeal would admit of no reſtraint, drew his ſword, and, without the leaſt order from his Maſter, ſtruck at one of the perſons who ſeemed to be remarkably buſy in binding Jeſus, and cut off his right ear. This wild and unwarrantable zeal was very offenſive to his Maſter, who rebuked Peter, and intreated the patience of the ſoldiers, while he miraculouſly healed the wound.

But now the fidelity of the apoſtles, which they had urged with ſo much confidence, was put to the trial. They ſaw their Maſter in the hands of a rude and inconſiderate band of men: and therefore ſhould have exerted their power to releaſe him, or at leaſt have been the companions of his ſufferings, and endeavoured, by every kind, endearing action, to have leſſened his grief. But, alas! inſtead of aſſiſting or comforting their Maſter, they all forſook him and fled.

The ſoldiers who had bound Jeſus led him away, and delivered him to the chief prieſts and elders, who carried him from one tribunal to another;

other; first to Annas, and then to Caiphas, where the Jewish Sanhedrim were assembled, in order to try and condemn him.

In the mean time, Peter, who had followed the other disciples in their flight, recovered his spirits, and, being encouraged by his companion St. John, returned to seek his Master. Seeing him leading to the high-priest's hall, he followed, at a distance, to know the event; but on his coming to the door was refused admittance, till one of the disciples who was acquainted there, came out and prevailed on the servant, who kept the door, to let him in. Peter, being admitted, repaired to the fire burning in the middle of the hall, round which the officers and servants were standing; where, being observed by the maid servant, who let him in, she charged him with being one of Christ's disciples: but Peter publicly denied the charge, declaring, that he did not know him, and presently withdrew into the porch, where he heard the cock crow, an intimation seemingly sufficient to awaken his conscience into a quick sense of his duty, and the promise he had a few hours before made to his Master. But, alas! human nature, when left to itself, is remarkably frail and inconstant. This Peter sufficiently experienced; for while he continued in the porch, another maid met him, and charged him with being one of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth; which Peter firmly denied, and, the better to gain belief, ratified it with an oath.

About an hour after this, the servant of the high priest, he whose ear Peter had cut off, charged him with being a disciple of Christ, and that he himself had seen him in the garden with him: adding, that his very speech sufficiently proved that he was a Galilean. Peter, however, still denied the fact; and to add to his sin, ratified it not only by an oath, but by a solemn curse and execration, that he was not the person, and that he knew not the man. But no sooner had he uttered this denial, than the cock crew; at which his Master turned about, and earnestly looked upon him in a manner that pierced him to the heart, and brought to his remembrance what his Saviour had more than once foretold, namely, that he would basely and shamefully deny him. Peter was now no longer able to contain his sorrow: he flew from the palace of the high priest, and wept bitterly, passionately bewailing

wailing his folly, and the aggravations of his ſin.

The fall of St. Peter ſhould convince us of the miſerable frailty even of the beſt of men, and effectually ſubdue thoſe vain confidences which are apt to riſe in our hearts, from our own ſuppoſed ſtrength and virtue. For as this great diſciple fell in ſo ſcandalous a manner, who ſhall hereafter dare to depend upon the higheſt degree of knowledge, when one ſo wiſe, ſo perfectly ſatisfied of the truth of the chriſtian doctrine, was, after the fulleſt convictions of his own conſcience, ſo weak and frail as to deny and adjure his Lord who inſtructed and bought him, even at the price of his own blood! Who ſhall preſume upon his beſt reſolutions, when he who declared ſo firm a purpoſe of adhering to Jeſus, did, within a few hours, peremptorily and ſolemnly diſown that very perſon, for whoſe ſake he was lately ready and diſpoſed to lay down his life. We ought, therefore, on all occaſions, to pray for and rely on the divine aſſiſtance, which alone can enable us to ſtand in a day of trial. There is, indeed, no reaſon to doubt, that St. Peter at that time ſpoke the very ſenſe of his ſoul; that he had an honeſt and ſincere heart, was ſtedfaſtly determined, and, as he thought, able to perform what, with ſo much piety and affection, he intended and profeſſed. But his misfortune was, that he did not conſider the infirmities of human nature, promiſing, in the warmth of his zeal, more than he was able to perform. He relied on his own integrity, thinking good reſolutions a ſufficient defence againſt the moſt violent temptations. But when the aſſault was made, and danger, with her terrifying aſpect, appeared, the event ſufficiently proved, that how willing ſoever the ſpirit might be, yet the fleſh was exceedingly frail and weak.

We have in St. Peter a ſad experiment for our inſtruction. The opinion of his own ſtrength proved his ruin. So dangerous and fatal is it to lean on our own underſtandings; to be wiſe, good, and ſafe, in our own conceit: when all our ſufficiency, all our ſafety, is of God.

We ſhould alſo, from this example, remember the wiſdom and goodneſs of the Almighty, in cauſing the faults and infirmities of his ſaints to be recorded in the holy ſcripture, and the uſe we ought to make of their failings and temptations. The eminent perſeverance in the cauſe of Chriſt, and their as eminent repentance,

ance, where they did amiſs, are written as a ſeaſonable warning, and exhibit an inſtance of humiliation to all future ages: by letting us ſee, that the moſt perfect are but men, ſubject to blemiſhes and imperfections; and that the higheſt and pureſt ſtate is no ſecurity from danger. This ſhould make us very tender how we judge and deſpiſe our brethren, whoſe faults, however ſeverely we may cenſure them, might probably have been our own, had we been in their circumſtances; for, "let him that thinketh he ſtandeth, take heed leſt he fall." We ſhould not then promiſe ourſelves ſuch ſafety and freedom from temptations, in any circumſtances of life, as to think we are incapable of committing the blackeſt crimes, ſhould the Almighty withdraw his grace, and leave us to ourſelves.

And as their failings admoniſh, ſo they alſo ſhould comfort us, by demonſtrating that God does not ſuddenly caſt off his ſervants, when they have heinouſly offended him; that we ought not to deſpair, though our tranſgreſſions be great and many; for if we will return, with true contrition of ſoul, we ſhall be kindly received, and freely pardoned. Thoſe who fall with him ſhould earneſtly pray for that repentance which he had, a repentance which needeth not to be repented of.

CHAP. V.

An Account of what befel this Apoſtle, from the Reſurrection of his bleſſed Maſter, to his Aſcenſion into Heaven.

IT is certain, from various circumſtances, that Peter, after the crucifixion of his Lord and Maſter, ſtayed at Jeruſalem, or at leaſt in the neighbourhood, for when Mary Magdalene returned from the ſepulchre, to inform the diſciples that the ſtone was rolled away from the door, and the body not to be found, Peter and John ſet out immediately towards the garden. John, who was the younger, arrived at the ſepulchre firſt, looked into it, but did not enter, either out of fear or reverence to our Saviour. Peter came ſoon after, and reſolutely went into the ſepulchre, where he found the linen clothes lying together in one place, and the napkin that was about his head, wrapped together in another, a ſufficient indication that the body was not ſtolen away; for had that been the caſe, ſo much care and order would not have been obſerved in diſpoſing of the linen clothes.

But Peter did not wait long in

ſuſpence, with regard to his great Lord and Maſter, for the ſame day Jeſus appeared to him; and as he was the firſt of the diſciples who had made a ſignal confeſſion of the divinity of the Meſſiah's miſſion, ſo it was reaſonable he ſhould firſt ſee him, after his reſurrection: and at the ſame time to convince him that the crime he had been guilty of, in denying him, was pardoned, and that he was come, like the good Samaritan, to pour oil into the wounded conſcience.

Soon after the apoſtles prepared to obey the command of their great Maſter, of retiring into Galilee; and we find that Peter, Nathaniel, the two ſons of Zebedee, and two other diſciples, returned to their old trade of fiſhing on the lake.

One morning early, as they were labouring at their employment, having ſpent the whole night to no purpoſe, they ſaw on the ſhore a grave perſon who called to them, and aſked them if they had any meat? to which they anſwered, No. Caſt then, replied he, the net on the right ſide of the ſhip, and ye ſhall find. They followed his directions, and caught a prodigious number of large fiſhes. Aſtoniſhed at ſuch remarkable ſucceſs, the diſciples looked one upon another for ſome time, till St. John told Peter, that the perſon on the ſhore was, doubtleſs, their great Lord and Maſter, whom the winds, the ſea, and the inhabitants of the watery region, were ready to obey.

Peter no ſooner heard the beloved diſciple declare his opinion concerning the ſtranger, than his zeal took fire, and, notwithſtanding the coldneſs of the ſeaſon, girt on his fiſher's coat, threw himſelf into the ſea, and ſwam to ſhore; his impatience to be with his dear Lord and Maſter not ſuffering him to ſtay the few minutes neceſſary to bring the ſhip to land.

As ſoon as the diſciples came on ſhore, they found a fire kindled, and fiſh laid upon it, either immediately created by the power of their divine Maſter, or which came aſhore of its own accord, and offered itſelf to his hand. But notwithſtanding there were fiſh already on the fire, he ordered them to bring of thoſe they had now caught, and dreſs them for their repaſt, he himſelf eating with them; both to give them an inſtance of mutual love and friendſhip, and alſo to aſſure them of the truth of human nature, ſince he was riſen from the dead.

When the repaſt was ended, our bleſſed

bleſſed Saviour addreſſed himſelf particularly to Peter, urging him to the utmoſt diligence in his care of ſouls: and becauſe he knew that nothing but a ſincere love to himſelf could ſupport him under the trouble and dangers of ſo laborious and difficult an employment, he enquired of him, whether he loved him more than the reſt of the Apoſtles; mildly reproving him for his over-confident reſolution. Peter, whom fatal experience had taught humility, modeſtly anſwered, that none knew ſo well as himſelf the integrity of his affections. Thou knoweſt the hearts of all men nothing is hid from thee, and therefore thou knoweſt that I love thee. The queſtion was three ſeveral times repeated by our bleſſed Saviour, and as oftentimes anſwered by the Apoſtle; it being but juſt, that he, who by a threefold denial had given ſo much reaſon to queſtion his affection, ſhould now by a threefold confeſſion, give more than common aſſurance of his ſincere love of his Maſter; and to each of theſe confeſſions our great Redeemer added this ſignal trial of his affection, (Feed my ſheep) Inſtruct and teach them with the utmoſt care, and the utmoſt tenderneſs.

The bleſſed Jeſus having thus engaged Peter to a chearful compliance with the dangers that might attend the diſcharge of his office, particularly intimated to him the fate that would attend him; telling him, that when he was young, he girt himſelf, lived at his pleaſure, and went wherever his fancy directed him; but when he ſhould reach the term of old age, he ſhould ſtretch forth his hands, and another ſhould gird and bind him, and lead him whither he had no deſire to go, intimating, as the evangeliſt tells us, "by what death he ſhould glorify God."

Peter was well pleaſed to drink the bitter cup, and make his confeſſion as public as his denial, providing all would be ſufficient to atone for his former ſin. And ſeeing John following, he aſked his great Maſter, what ſhould be his fate, and whether he who had been the object of his Maſter's love, in his lifetime, ſhould not have as honourable a death, as he that had denied him? To which Jeſus replied, it doth not concern thee to know how I ſhall diſpoſe of events, with regard to him: he ſhall ſee the deſtruction of the Jewiſh nation, and then go down to the chambers of the duſt in peace.

Not long after, our bleſſed Saviour appeared

appeared to his diſciples at Jeruſalem, to take his laſt farewel of them, who had conſtantly attended him during his public miniſtry among the ſons of men.

He now led them out as far as Bethany, a ſmall village on the Mount of Olives, where he briefly told them that they were the perſons he had choſen to be the witneſſes, both of his death and reſurrection; a teſtimony which they ſhould publiſh in every part of the world. In order to which, he would, after his aſcenſion into heaven, pour out his ſpirit upon them, in an extraordinary manner, that they might be the better enabled to ſtruggle with that violent rage and fury, with which the doctrine of the goſpel would be oppoſed by men and devils. Adding, that in the mean time, they ſhould return to Jeruſalem, and there wait till thoſe miraculous powers were given them on high.

Having finiſhed this diſcourſe, he layed hands upon them, and gave them his ſolemn benediction; during which he was taken from them, and received up into the regions of the heavenly Canaan. The apoſtles who beheld their Maſter viſibly aſcend into heaven, were filled with a greater ſenſe of his glory, than they had ever been while he converſed with them familiarly on earth. And having performed their ſolemn adorations to him, they returned to Jeruſalem with great joy, there to wait for the accompliſhment of their great Maſter's promiſe. How ſudden a change was now wrought in the minds of the apoſtles! They who were lately overwhelmed with ſorrow, at the very mention of their Lord's departure from them, beheld him now with joy and triumph; they were fully ſatisfied of his glorious advancement to the right-hand of Omnipotence, and of that peculiar care and providence which they were ſure he would exerciſe over them, in purſuance of thoſe great truſts he had committed to their care.

CHAP. VI.

Tranſactions of Peter, from the Aſcenſion of his bleſſed Maſter, to the Diſperſion of the Church at Jeruſalem.

THE apoſtles, though deprived of the perſonal preſence of their dear Lord and Maſter, were indefatigable in fulfilling the commiſſion they had received from him. The firſt object that engaged their attention, after their return to Jeruſalem, was to fill up the vacancy in their

their number, lately made by the unhappy fall and apoſtacy of Judas. In order to this, they called together the church, and entered into an upper room, when Peter, as preſident of the aſſembly, propoſed to them the choice of a new apoſtle.

He put them in mind that Judas, one of the diſciples of their great and beloved Maſter, being betrayed by his covetous and inſatiable temper, had lately fallen from the honour of his place and miniſtry. That this was no more than what the prophet had long ſince foretold ſhould come to paſs; and that the care of the church, which had been committed to him, ſhould devolve upon another: that therefore it was highly neceſſary the ſame perſon who had been familiarly converſant with the bleſſed Jeſus, from firſt to laſt, and conſequently, a competent witneſs both of his doctrine and miracles, his death, reſurrection, and aſcenſion, ſhould be ſubſtituted in his ſtead.

This, indeed, was highly requiſite; for as no witneſs is ſo valid and ſatisfactory as the teſtimony of an eye-witneſs, as the apoſtles all along principally inſiſted on this, that they delivered nothing to the world, concerning the great Redeemer of mankind, than what they themſelves had ſeen and heard, as his riſing from the dead was a principle likely to meet with the greateſt oppoſition, and which would be the moſt difficult tenet of the goſpel to be believed by the ſons of men, they urged this great truth, inceſſantly declaring, that they were "eye-witneſſes of his reſurrection," that they had ſeen and felt him: eaten and familiarly converſed with him, after his return from the chambers of the grave. It was, therefore, highly requiſite that ſuch an apoſtle ſhould be choſen; and accordingly two candidates were propoſed; Joſeph, called Barſabas, and Matthias, both qualified for the great and important office of the apoſtleſhip. And having prayed that the divine providence would immediately guide and direct their choice, they caſt lots, and the lot fell upon Matthias, who was accordingly admitted into the number of the twelve apoſtles.

After filling up the vacancy in the apoſtolic number, they ſpent their time in prayer and meditation, till the feaſt of Pentecoſt; when the promiſe of their great Maſter in ſending the Holy Ghoſt was fulfilled. The chriſtian aſſembly were met as uſual, to perform the public ſervices of their worſhip, when ſuddenly a

ſound, like that of a mighty wind, ruſhed in upon them; repreſenting the powerful efficacy of that divine ſpirit which was now to be communicated to them. After this there appeared ſmall flames of fire, which, in the ſhape of cloven tongues, deſcended and ſat upon the head of each of them, to denote that their enjoyment of this gift ſhould be conſtant and perpetual; and not like the prophets of old, who were inſpired only at ſome particular times and ſeaſons. Upon this they were all immediately filled with the Holy Ghoſt, which in an inſtant, enabled them to ſpeak fluently ſeveral languages they had never learned, and probably never heard.

The report of ſo ſudden and ſtrange an action was ſoon ſpread through every part of Jeruſalem, which at that time was full of Jewiſh proſelytes, "devout men out of every nation under heaven, Parthians, Medes, Elamites, the dwellers in Meſapotamia and Judea, Capadocia, Pontius and Aſia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt, the parts of Lybia and Cyrene," from Rome, from Crete, and from Arabia. Theſe no ſooner heard of this miraculous effuſion of the Holy Spirit, than they flocked in prodigious numbers to the chriſtian aſſembly, where they were amazed to hear theſe Galileans ſpeaking to them in their own native language, ſo various and ſo very different from one another. And it could not fail of exceedingly increaſing the wonder, to reflect on the meanneſs of the ſpeakers, who were neither aſſiſted by genius, poliſhed by education, or improved by uſe and cuſtom. The diſciples were deſtitute of all theſe aſſiſtances; their parts were mean, their education trifling, and their experience in ſpeaking before great aſſemblies, nothing. Yet theſe perſons ſpoke boldly, and with the greateſt propriety, in various languages. Nor were their diſcourſes filled with idle ſtories, or the follies of a luxuriant fancy. No, they expatiated on the great and admirable works of Omnipotence, and the myſteries of the Goſpel, which human apprehenſion could never diſcover.

This ſurprizing tranſaction had different effects on the minds of the audience: ſome attributing to it the effect of a miracle, and others the power and ſtrength of new wine. Upon which the apoſtles all ſtood up, and Peter, in the name of the reſt, undertook to confute this injurious calumny.

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He told them that this ſcandalous ſlander proceeded from the ſpirit of malice and falſhood: that their cenſure was uncharitable, as it was unjuſt: that it was early in the morning and therefore not a time for drinking, eſpecially on a day ſet apart for devotion; that theſe extraordinary and miraculous effects were but the accompliſhment of an ancient prophecy, which the Almighty had expreſsly declared ſhould be fulfilled in the times of the Meſſiah: that Jeſus of Nazareth had evidently proved himſelf to be that great prophet, the ſon of the Moſt High, by many unqueſtionable miracles, of which they themſelves had been eye-witneſſes; and though, by the permiſſion of Omnipotence, who had determined by this means, to bring about the redemption of mankind, they had wickedly crucified and ſlain him, yet God had raiſed him from the dead; nor was it conſiſtent with the juſtice and goodneſs of the Almighty, eſpecially thoſe divine predictions made concerning him, that he ſhould be confined in the chambers of the grave; David having particularly foretold, "That his fleſh ſhould reſt in hope, that God woud not leave his ſoul in hell, neither ſuffer his Holy One to ſee corruption; but would make known to him the way to life."

That this prophecy could not relate to David himſelf, as he had many ages ſince been reduced to duſt, and his fleſh paſſed through the different ſtages of corruption, his tomb being yet viſible among them, and from whence he was known never to return; and therefore the prophecy muſt relate to Chriſt, having never been truly fulfilled in any but him, who both died and was riſen again, whereof they were his witneſſes. Nay, that he was not only riſen from the dead, but aſcended into the higheſt heaven, and, according to David's prediction, "ſat down on the right hand of God, until he had made his enemies his footſtool:" which could not be primarily meant of David, as he never aſcended bodily into heaven; that therefore the whole houſe of Iſrael ought to believe, that this very Jeſus, whom they had crucified, was the perſon that God had appointed to be the Meſſiah, the founder of the Chriſtian church, and the Saviour of the world.

This diſcourſe, though the firſt that St. Peter ever made in public, deeply affected the audience, and every

every word, like a dagger, pierced them to the heart, so that they cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" To which Peter answered, the only way to expiate your guilt, obtain pardon for the many sins you have committed, and acquire the gift of the Holy Ghost, is to repent sincerely, and be baptized into the religion of this crucified Saviour. Upon these terms the promises of the new covenant, ratified by the death of the Son of God, will belong to you and your children, and to all that sincerely believe and embrace the gospel. He also used the most forcible and endearing expressions to prevail on them to listen to the inviting calls of the Son of God, and thereby save themselves from that unavoidable ruin and destruction, which would shortly fall on the heads of the wicked and headstrong generation of unbelieving Jews.

The effect of this discourse was equally wonderful and surprising; for great numbers of those, who before ridiculed the religion of Jesus, now acknowledged him for their Saviour, and flew to him for refuge from the impending storms; and St, Luke tells us, that there were that day added to the church no less than three thousand souls, who were all baptized and received into the flock of the great Shepherd of Israel, the bishop of our souls. A quick and plentiful harvest indeed! "This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes."

Soon after this wonderful conversion, Peter and John, going up to the temple about three in the afternoon, near the conclusion of one of the solemn hours of prayer, saw a poor impotent cripple, near forty years of age, who had been lame from his birth, lying at the beautiful gate of the temple, and asking alms of those who entered the sacred edifice. This miserable object moved their compassion; and Peter beholding him with attention, said, the riches of this world, the silver and gold so highly coveted by the sons of men, are not in my power to bestow; but I possess the power of restoring life and health, and am ready to assist thee.

Then taking the man by the hand, he commanded him, in the name of "Jesus of Nazareth, to rise up and walk." Immediately the nerves and sinews were enlarged, and the several parts of the diseased members performed their natural functions. Upon which the man accompanied them

them into the temple, walking, leaping, and praiſing of God.

So ſtrange and extraordinary a cure filled the minds of the people with admiration, and their curioſity drew them round the apoſtle, to view the man who had performed it. Peter, ſeeing the multitude gathering round them, took the opportunity of ſpeaking to them, in the following manner: "Men and brethren, this remarkable cure ſhould not excite your admiration of us, as if we had performed it by our own power. It was wrought in the name of Jeſus of Nazareth, our crucified Maſter, by the power of that very Chriſt, that holy and juſt perſon, whom you yourſelves denied, and delivered to Pilate, nay, and preferred a murderer before him, when the governor was deſirous of letting him go. But though you have put him to death, yet we are witneſſes that He hath raiſed him again from the dead, and that he is aſcended into heaven, where he will remain till the great and tremendous day of general reſtitution. This I know was done by you and our rulers, through ignorance, not being thoroughly convinced of the greatneſs and divinity of his perſon, an ignorance by which the great and righteous deſigns of Omnipotence were brought about, and the prophecies concerning the perſon and ſufferings of the Meſſiah, delivered by Moſes, Samuel, and all the prophets, ſince the world began, have been accompliſhed. But now it is high time to repent and turn to God, that your crying ſins may be forgiven, that when the Meſſiah ſhall ſhortly appear to execute judgment upon the Jewiſh nation, it may be time of comfort to you, as it will be of vengeance and deſtruction to others. You ſhould remember that you are the peculiar perſons to whom the bleſſings and the promiſes primarily belong, and to whom the Almighty firſt ſent his Son, that he might ſhower on you his bleſſings, by turning you away from your iniquities."

While Peter was ſpeaking to the people, in one part of the temple, John was, in all probability, doing the ſame, in the other; and the ſucceſs plainly indicated how powerful the preaching of the apoſtles was: five thouſand perſons embracing the doctrines of the goſpel, and acknowledging the crucified Jeſus for their Lord and Saviour.

Such amazing ſucceſs could not fail of exciting the attention and envy of the rulers of Iſrael. Accordingly

the prieſts and Sadducees repaired to the Roman magiſtrate, and intimated to him, that, in all probability, this concourſe of people would prove the cauſe of a tumult and inſurrection. Upon this information, the captain of the temple ſeized on the apoſtles, and caſt them into priſon.

The next day they were carried before the Jewiſh Sanhedrim: and being aſked by what power and authority they had done this, Peter boldly anſwered, "Be it known unto you, and to all the deſcendants of Jacob, that this miracle was wrought wholly in the name of Jeſus of Nazareth, whom ye yourſelves have crucified and ſlain, and whom the Almighty hath raiſed again from the dead. This is the ſtone which your builders refuſed, and which is become the head of the corner. Nor is there any other way, by which you, or any of the ſons of men, can be ſaved, but by this crucified Saviour."

This boldneſs of the apoſtle was admired by all, even by the court of the Sanhedrim. And it ſhould be remembered, that theſe very judges were the perſons who had ſo lately condemned the bleſſed Jeſus himſelf, and had no other way of juſtifying their proceedings, than by a ſecond act of cruelty; that the apoſtle did not charge them with the crime of crucifying the Son of God in ſecret, but in the open court of judicature, and in the hearing of all the people.

The court, after beholding them with a kind of aſtoniſhment, remembered that they had ſeen them with Jeſus of Nazareth, and therefore ordered them to withdraw, while they debated among themſelves what was proper to be done. It was impoſſible to deny the miracle; for it was performed before all the people, and the perſon on whom it was wrought was no ſtranger in Jeruſalem. They therefore reſolved to charge them ſtrictly not to preach any more, in the name of Jeſus. Accordingly they were again called in, and acquainted with this reſolution of the council. To which the apoſtles anſwered, That as they had received a commiſſion from heaven, to declare to all nations what they had ſeen and heard, it was certainly their duty to obey God, rather than man.

This was a fair appeal to the conſciences of their very judges; but theſe rulers of Iſrael, inſtead of being ſatisfied with it, would, in all probability,

bability, have proceeded to a greater violence, had not the veneration of the people for the apoſtles checked their malice: ſo that all they dared to do, was to enforce their menaces, and diſmiſs them.

When the apoſtles returned to their brethren, they informed them of the treatment they had met with from the Jewiſh magiſtrates. Upon which they all joined in prayer to the Almighty, for an extraordinary ſupply of courage and aſſiſtance, to enable them to execute their commiſſion in theſe perilous times, and plant the religion of their crucified Saviour. Nor were their prayers offered in vain; for before they had concluded their fervent addreſſes to the throne of grace, the houſe was again ſhaken with a mighty wind, as on the day of Pentecoſt; and they were inſtantly repleniſhed with freſh meaſures of the Holy Ghoſt, and, notwithſtanding all the threatnings of the Jewiſh rulers, found themſelves enabled to preach the Goſpel of their great and beloved Maſter, with more boldneſs than ever.

The labours of the Apoſtles were crowned with abundant ſucceſs, and it ſeems that ſuch was the averſion of the inverate Jews, to thoſe who became converts to the faith of Chriſt, that they were deprived of buſineſs in their reſpective callings; for we find that the profeſſors of the religion of the holy Jeſus ſold their eſtates, and brought the money to the Apoſtles, that they might depoſite it in one common treaſury, and from thence ſupply the ſeveral exigencies of the church.

But hypocriſy was not unknown among the profeſſors of religion, even in theſe primitive times. Ananias, and his wife Saphira, having embraced the doctrines of the Goſpel, pretended to follow the free and generous ſpirit of the times, by conſecrating and devoting their eſtate to the honour of God, and the neceſſities of the church. Accordingly, they ſold their poſſeſſions, and brought part of the money, and laid it at the feet of the apoſtles; hoping to deceive them, though guided by the ſpirit of Omnipotence. But Peter, at his firſt coming in, aſked Ananias, how he could ſuffer Satan to fill his heart with ſuch enormous wickedneſs, as to think to deceive the Holy Ghoſt, That before it was ſold, it was wholly in his own power; and afterwards the money entirely at his own diſpoſal: ſo that his action was capable of no other interpretation, than that he had not only

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abuſed an injured man, but mocked the Almighty himſelf, who he muſt know was privy to his moſt ſecret thoughts.

The apoſtles had no ſooner finiſhed, than Ananias, to the great terror of all that were preſent, fell down dead, by a ſtroke from heaven.

Not long after his wife came in, whom Peter reproved in the ſame manner he had done her huſband, adding, that ſhe ſhould immediately end her life in the ſame awful manner; upon which ſhe was ſmitten by the hand of omnipotence, and fell down dead; ſharing with her huſband in the puniſhment, as ſhe had before in the heinous crime. This remarkable inſtance of ſeverity, filled all the converts with fear and trembling, and prevented, in a great meaſure, that hypocriſy and diſſimulation, by which others might flatter themſelves to deceive the church.

But ſuch inſtances of ſeverity were very extraordinary, the power of the apoſtles was generally exerted in works of mercy and beneficence towards the ſons and daughters of affliction. They cured all kinds of diſeaſes, and caſt out devils; ſo that they brought the ſick into the ſtreets, and laid them upon beds and couches, that the ſhadow at leaſt or Peter as he paſſed by might cover ſome of them: well knowing, a ſingle touch or word from either of the apoſtles were ſufficient to remove the moſt inveterate diſeaſe.

Such aſtoniſhing miracles could not fail of contributing to the propagation of the Goſpel, and to convince the world, that the apoſtles were far more conſiderable perſons than they at firſt took them to be; and that poverty and meanneſs may be blended with true worth and genuine greatneſs. How ſmall and inſignificant is the power and dignity of all earthly monarchs, when compared to this glory of the apoſtles! and how contemptible were the triumphs of a Pompey and Cæſar, when placed in competition with the greatneſs and majeſty of St. Peter, who converted the world from idolatry and the worſhip of devils, and withdrew the veil of ignorance from the underſtandings of the human race; not by the power of armies, nor the inſinuating artifices of pomp and grandeur; but by faith in the power of his Saviour.

But the ſtupendous works of the apoſtles, and the growing numbers of the church, alarmed the rulers of Iſrael, who ſeized the apoſtles and caſt them into priſon. Their power, how-

however, was limited, like the drop of a bucket to the ocean, when oppoſed to the Almighty arm of the great Jehovah. The priſon-doors, though faſtened with the utmoſt caution, opened of themſelves at the approach of a meſſenger from the courts of heaven, who commanded the apoſtles to leave the dungeon, repair to the temple, and preach the glad tidings of the Goſpel to the people.

The officers, returning in the morning, found the priſon-doors ſhut and guarded, but the priſoners gone. This remarkable circumſtance greatly alarmed them, and they repaired to the council to acquaint them with what had happened. The rulers were aſtoniſhed at the news; but hearing that the apoſtles were teaching in the temple, they ſent an officer to bring them, without the leaſt violence to their perſons, before the Sanhedrim. Their order was ſoon obeyed, and the diſciples of Jeſus placed before the ſame court that had ſo lately condemned their Maſter.

The apoſtles being thus brought before the Sanhedrim, the high-prieſt aſked them, How they dared to propagate a doctrine they had ſo ſtrictly charged them not to preach? To which Peter, in the name of the reſt, replied, "We certainly ought to obey God, rather than man. And though you have ſo barbarouſly and contumelioufly treated the Saviour of the world, yet God hath raiſed him up to be a prince and Saviour, to give both repentance and remiſſion of ſins. And of theſe things both we, and the miraculous power which the Holy Ghoſt hath conferred on all chriſtians, are witneſſes."

This anſwer, delivered with remarkable boldneſs, exaſperated the council, and they began to conſult how they might deſtroy them. But Gamaliel, a grave and learned counſellor, after commanding the apoſtles to withdraw, deſired them to proceed with caution in an affair of this nature; reminding them that ſeveral perſons had already raiſed parties, and drawn great numbers of perſons after them; but that every one of them had miſcarried, and all their deſigns were rendered abortive, without the interpoſition of that court. That they would therefore do well to let the apoſtles alone; for if their doctrines and deſigns were of human invention, they would come to nothing; but if they were of God, all their powers and policies, would be of no effect, and ſad experience would too ſoon convince them, that

they had themſelves oppoſed the counſels of the Moſt High.

This prudent and rational advice had the deſired ſucceſs; the council were ſatisfied, and after commanding the apoſtles to be ſcourged, they ſtrictly charged them to preach no more in the name of Jeſus, and ſet them at liberty. But this charge had little effect on the diſciples of the bleſſed Jeſus; they returned home in triumph, rejoicing that they were thought worthy to ſuffer in ſo righteous a cauſe, and to undergo ſhame and reproach for ſo kind and ſo powerful a maſter. Nor could all the oppoſition of men, blended with the malice of the power of darkneſs, diſcourage them from performing their duty to the Almighty, or leſſen their zeal for preaching, both in public and private, the doctrine of the goſpel.

CHAP. VII.

Concluding ſcenes of St. Peter's Life.

THE chriſtian doctrine had been propagated hitherto without much violence of oppoſition, in Jeruſalem, but now a ſtorm commenced with the death of the Proto-martyr Stephen, nor did it end but with the diſperſion of the diſciples, by which means the glad tidings of the goſpel, which had till now, been confined to Judea, and the profeſſors of it hid in ſecret places, was preached to the Gentile world, and an ancient prophecy fulfilled, which ſays; "Out of Sion ſhall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jeruſalem." Thus does the Almighty bring good out of evil, and cauſe the malicious intentions of the wicked to redound to his praiſe.

Among the diſperſed followers of the bleſſed Jeſus, Philip the deacon retired to Samaria, where he preached the goſpel, and confirmed his doctrine by many miraculous cures, and caſting out devils. In this city was one Simon, who by magic arts and diabolical ſorceries, was beheld with admiration by the people; and ſome conſidered him as the great power of God, a name he blaſphemouſly gave himſelf, pretending to be the firſt and chief deity, or what every nation conſidered as the ſupreme God.

This wicked mortal, hearing the ſermons of Philip, and beholding the miracles wrought by him, became a convert to the religion of Jeſus, and was baptized with the others who had embraced the chriſtian doctrine.

The apoſtles who continued at Jeruſalem,

Jeruſalem, were ſoon informed of this remarkable ſucceſs of Philip's miniſtry at Samaria, and thought it neceſſary to ſend him aſſiſtance. Accordingly Peter and John were deputed to this infant church, who having prayed and laid their hands on the new converts, they received the Holy Ghoſt.

Such miraculous gifts aſtoniſhed the magician, and deſirous of obtaining the ſame privilege, he offered the diſciples money to inveſt him with this power, that on whomſoever he laid his hand, he might receive the Holy Ghoſt. But Peter, who perceived the inſincerity of his heart, rejected his offer with ſcorn and deteſtation. "Thy money (ſaid the great apoſtle) periſh with thee. And as thy heart is ſo full of hypocriſy and deceit, thou canſt have no ſhare nor portion in ſo great a privilege. Thou wouldſt do well to repent for ſo monſtrous a crime, and ſincerely apply thyſelf to ſeek the Almighty, that the thoughts of thy heart may be forgiven thee; for I perceive that thy diſpoſition of mind is ſtill vicious and corrupt, and that thou art yet bound by the chains of iniquity, and in a ſtate diſpleaſing to the Almighty, and dangerous to thyſelf."

Simon was terrified at this ſpeech of St. Peter: his conſcience flew in his face, and he prayed the apoſtles to make interceſſions for him to the throne of grace, that the Almighty might pardon his ſin, and not inflict on him thoſe heavy judgments.

The apoſtles did not ſtay any longer in Samaria than was neceſſary to confirm the new converts in the faith they had embraced, and to preach the glad-tidings of ſalvation in the adjacent villages; after which they returned to Jeruſalem, to aſſiſt the reſt of the diſciples with their power.

The ſtorm, though violent, being at length blown over, the church enjoyed a time of calmneſs and ſecurity; during which St. Peter went to viſit the churches lately planted in thoſe parts, by the diſciples whom the perſecution had diſperſed. And at his arrival at Lydda, he miraculouſly healed Æneas, who had been afflicted with the palſy, and confined to his bed eight years; but on Peter bidding him ariſe in the name of Jeſus, he was immediately reſtored to perfect health. Nor was the ſucceſs of his miracle confined to Æneas and his family: the fame of it was blazed through all the neighbouring country, and many believed in the doctrine

trine of the Son of God. It was even known at Joppa, a ſea-port town about ſix miles from Lydda, and the brethren immediately ſent for Peter, on the following melancholy occaſion. Tabitha, whoſe Greek name was Dorcas, a woman venerable for her piety, and extenſive charity, was newly dead, to the great loſs of mankind, ſhe being remarkably benevolent to the poor and afflicted, who were ſupported by her charity.

At Peter's arrival he found her dreſſed for funeral ſolemnity, and ſurrounded by mournful widows, who ſhewed the coats and garments wherewith ſhe had cloated them, the monuments of her liberality. But Peter put them all out, and kneeling down, prayed with the utmoſt fervency; then turning to the body, he commanded her to ariſe, and taking her by the hand, preſented her in perfect health to her friends and others, who were aſſembled to pay their laſt duties to ſo good a woman. This miracle confirmed thoſe who had newly embraced the goſpel of Jeſus, and converted many more to the faith. After which he ſtayed a conſiderable time at Joppa, lodging in the houſe of one Simon a tanner.

During his abode in this city, one day when he was offering up his prayers to the Almighty, he found himſelf hungry and called for meat; but while it was dreſſing for him, he fell into a trance, wherein was preſented to him a large ſheet let down from heaven, containing all ſorts of creatures clean and unclean; and at the ſame time a voice ſaid to him, "ariſe Peter, kill and eat." But the apoſtle, as yet tenacious of the rites and inſtitution of the Moſaic law, anſwered, that his conſcience refuſed to comply, having never eaten any thing that was common or unclean. To which the voice replied, That it was unjuſt to conſider that as common which God had cleanſed. This was done thrice, after which the veſſel was again drawn up to heaven, and the viſion diſappeared. By this ſymbolical repreſentation, St. Peter was given to underſtand, that the Almighty was now going to ſend him on a new embaſſy, which the Spirit at the ſame time commanded him to undertake. While he was ſtill wondering with himſelf what the event would prove, three meſſengers knocked at the gate, enquiring for him: and from them he received the following account. That Cornelius, a Roman, captain of a band of Italian ſoldiers, at Cæſaria, a perſon

ſon of great piety and religion, one who had been long a proſelyte, had, by an immediate command from God, ſent for him.

The next day Peter, accompanied by ſome of the brethren, went with the meſſengers, and the day after arrived at Cæſarea. Cornelius having information of his coming, had ſummoned his friends and kindred to Cæſarea: and at the apoſtle's entering his houſe, fell at his feet, a method of addreſs frequent in the Eaſtern countries. But Peter, who conſidered that honour as due only to the Almighty, lifted him up, and declared to the company the reaſon of his coming, ſaying, he had lately learned, that there was no reſpect of perſons with God.

When the apoſtle had ended his ſpeech, Cornelius, at his requeſt, related the particular reaſon for his ſending for him. "Four days ago, ſaid this Roman officer, being converſant in the duties of faſting and prayer, an angel from the courts of heaven appeared to me, declaring that my prayers and alms were come up as a memorial before the throne of the Moſt High; and at the ſame time ordered me to ſend to Joppa for one Simon Peter, who lodged in the houſe of a tanner near the ſeaſide, and would give me farther information in the myſteries of Salvation. Accordingly I made no heſitation to obey the heavenly meſſenger: I ſent immediately for thee: and now thou art come, and we are met together, I deſire to hear what inſtructions thou haſt to communicate."

The relation of the Roman centurion aſtoniſhed the apoſtle; but he was ſoon convinced that God had broken down the partition-wall, and no longer maintained a peculiar kindneſs for the ſons of Jacob; that it was not the nation, but the religion: not the external quality of the man, but the internal temper of the mind, that recommended the human race to the favour of Omnipotence: that the devout and pious, the righteous and the good man, whatever part of the earth they may inhabit, is the favourite of heaven; that God as highly reſpects a juſt and virtuous man, in the barren waſtes of Sythia, as on the mountain of Sion; that the reconciling and making peace between God and man, by Jeſus Chriſt, was the doctrine publiſhed by the prophets of old; and that God had now anointed and conſecrated Jeſus of Nazareth with divine powers, in the exerciſe whereof he went about

doing good to the children of men: that they had ſeen all he had done among the Jews, whom though they had ſlain and crucified, yet that God had raiſed him again the third day, and had openly ſhewed him to his apoſtles and followers, whom he had choſen to be his peculiar witneſſes, and whom he had accordingly permitted to eat and drink with him after his reſurrection, commanding them to preach the Goſpel to all mankind, and to teſtify that he was the perſon whom God had ordained to be the great judge of the world; that all the prophets with one conſent bore witneſs of him; and that this Jeſus is he, in whoſe name whoſoever believes, would certainly receive remiſſion of ſins.

While Peter was thus preaching to them, the Holy Ghoſt fell upon the greateſt part of his hearers, enabling them to ſpeak ſeveral languages, and in them to magnify the great Creator of the ſons of men. At this the Jews, who accompanied Peter, marvelled exceedingly, to ſee that the gifts of the Holy Ghoſt were poured upon the Gentiles; and Peter ſeeing this, told the company, that he knew no reaſon why theſe perſons ſhould not be baptized, as they had received the Holy Ghoſt, as well as they; and accordingly he gave orders that they ſhould be baptized, and to confirm them in the Holy Faith they had embraced, he ſtaid with them ſome time.

This action of St. Peter was conſidered in various lights by the brethren at Jeruſalem, who being but lately converted to the Chriſtian faith, were zealouſly attached to the religious ceremonies of the Moſaic inſtitution, and therefore moſt of them ſeverely charged Peter at his return, as being too familiar with the Gentiles. How powerful is the prejudice of education! The Jews had, for many ages, conceived an inveterate oppoſition againſt the Gentiles, conſidering them as perſons hated by the Almighty, who had choſen them for his peculiar people. The law of Moſes, indeed, enjoined them to be kind to their own nation, in preference to all others; and the rites and inſtitutions of their religion, and the peculiar form of their commonwealth, rendered them very different from the inhabitants of other countries: a ſeparation which in after ages they contracted into a much narrower compaſs. They were alſo tenaciouſly proud of their external privileges in being the deſcendants of Abraham, the friend of God; and therefore looked

looked upon the reſt of the world as reprobates, proudly refuſing to hold any converſation with them, and even to ſhew them the common kindneſſes of humanity.

It is therefore no wonder that they were highly diſpleaſed with St. Peter; nor would he have been able to have defended his conduct in a ſatisfactory manner, had he not been charged with a peculiar commiſſion from the Almighty for extending the privileges of the Goſpel to the Gentile world. But he had no ſooner informed them that the grace of the Goſpel was not confined to any particular nation or people, nor to ranks or degrees among men, than they immediately changed their diſpleaſure againſt him into thanks, to the beneficient father of the human race, who had granted to the Gentiles alſo repentance unto life eternal.

Peter having thus finiſhed his viſitation to the new planted churches, returned to Jeruſalem, and was indefatigable in inſtructing the converts in the religion of Jeſus, and preaching the glad tidings of ſalvation to the deſcendants of Jacob. But he did not long continue in this pleaſing courſe: Herod Agrippa, in order to ingratiate himſelf into the favour of the Jews, put the apoſtle James to death, and finding the action was highly acceptable to that ſtiff-necked people, he reſolved to extend his cruelty to Peter, and accordingly caſt him into priſon. But the churches were inceſſant in their prayers to God for his ſafety; and what have mortals to fear, when guarded by the hand of Omnipotence: Herod was perſuaded he ſhould ſoon accompliſh his intention, and ſacrifice Peter to the inſatiable cruelty of the Jews. But the night before this intended execution, a meſſenger from the courts of heaven viſited the gloomy horrors of the dungeon, where he found Peter aſleep between his keepers. The angel raiſed him up, and taking off his chains, ordered him to gird on his garments, and follow him. Peter obeyed, and having paſſed through the firſt and ſecond watch, they came to the iron gate leading to the city, which opened to them of its own accord. The angel alſo accompanied him through one of the ſtreets, and then departed from him; on which Peter came to himſelf, and perceived that it was no viſion; but that his great and beloved Maſter had really ſent a meſſenger from above, and releaſed him from priſon. He therefore repaired

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to the house of Mary, where the church was assembled, and offering up their prayers to the throne of grace for his safety. On his knocking at the door, a maid who came to let him in, knowing his voice, ran back to tell them that Peter was at the door; which they at first considered as the effect of fancy; but the damsel continuing to affirm that it was really true, they concluded it was is angel, or some messenger sent to him from the court of heaven. But on opening the door, they were convinced of their mistake, finding that it was really Peter himself, who briefly told them how he was delivered: and desiring them to inform his brethren of his being set at liberty, retired to another place.

In the morning the officers came from Herod to the prison, with orders to bring Peter out to the people, who were gathered together to behold his execution. But when they came to the prison, the keeper informed them that the apostle had made his escape: which so exasperated Herod, that he commanded those who were entrusted with the care of the prisoner, to be put to death.

Some time after this miraculous deliverance of St. Peter, a controversy arose between the Jewish and the Gentile converts, with regard to the observation of the Mosaic law; a dispute which gave great uneasiness to many persons: the Jews zealously contending that it was absolutely necessary to salvation to be circumcised, and observe the precepts of the ceremonial law, as well as those of the Gospel. To compose this difference, it was thought necessary to summon a general council of the apostles and brethren, to meet at Jerusalem. This was accordingly done, and the case thoroughly debated. At last Peter stood up, and declared that God having chosen him out of all the apostles to be the first preacher of the Gospel among the Gentiles, God, who was best able to judge of the hearts of men, had borne witness to them, that they were accepted of him, by giving them his holy spirit as well as he had done the Jews, and consequently that there was no difference between them. They could not therefore place the Jewish yoke, which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear, upon the necks of the disciples, without tempting and provoking the Almighty, who had given sufficient reasons to believe, that the Gentiles, as well as the

Jews,

Jews, would be ſaved by the grace of that Goſpel.

This declaration of St. Peter convinced the church, and it was unanimouſly decreed, that no other burden then the temporary obſervance of a few particular precepts, equally convenient to the Jew and Gentile, ſhould be impoſed on them. And the deciſion was drawn up into a ſynodical epiſtle, and ſent to the ſeveral churches for allaying the heats and controverſies this diſpute had occaſioned.

Soon after this council, Peter left Jeruſalem and went down to Antioch; where uſing the liberty given him by the Goſpel, he freely eat and converſed with the Gentile proſelytes, conſidering them now as "fellow citizens with the ſaints, and of the houſhold of God.". This he had been taught by the viſion of the ſheet let down from heaven; this had been lately decreed at Jeruſalem; this he had before practiſed with regard to Cornelius and his family, and juſtified the action to the ſatisfaction of his accuſers; and this he had freely and innocently done at Antioch, till ſome of the Jewiſh brethren coming thither, he, for fear of offending them, withdrew himſelf from the Gentiles, as if it had been unlawful for him to hold converſation with uncircumciſed perſons; notwithſtanding he knew, and was fully ſatisfied that our bleſſed Saviour had broken down the wall of partition, between the Jew and Gentile.

By thus acting againſt the light of his own mind and judgment, he condemned what he had approved, and deſtroyed the ſuperſtructure he had before erected; at the ſame time he confirmed the Jewiſh zealots in their inveterate errors, filled the minds of the Gentiles with ſcruples, and their conſciences with fears. Nor was this all, the old prejudices between the Jew and the Gentile were revived, and the whole number of Jewiſh converts following the apoſtles example, ſeparated themſelves from the company of Gentile Chriſtians. Nay, even Barnabas himſelf was carried away by this torrent of unwarrantable practice.

St. Paul was now at Antioch, and reſolutely oppoſed St. Peter to his face: he publicly reproved him as a perſon worthy to be blamed for his groſs prevarication. He reaſoned, and ſeverely expoſtulated with him, that he who was himſelf a Jew, and conſequently under a more immediate obligation of obſerving the Moſaic law, ſhould throw off the yoke himſelf,

ſelf, and at the ſame time endeavour to impoſe it on the Gentiles, who were never under the neceſſity of obſerving the ceremonies of the Iſraelites. A ſevere, though an impartial charge; but the remarkable eagerneſs of St. Paul to place things on a proper foundation, though he ſucceeded for the preſent, made a great noiſe afterwards in the world, and gave occaſion to the enemies of Chriſtianity to repreſent the whole as a compact of forgery and deceit: of ſuch pernicious conſequences are diſputes among the princes of the church, and ſo fatal are the effects of puſillanimity, and a fear of offending perſons bigotted to inſignificant ceremonies.

As we have already related all the tranſactions of this apoſtle, that are founded on ſcripture authority, and men, we ſhall now have recourſe to ancient hiſtory for the reſidue of his life.

Some time before this conteſt at Antioch, St. Peter preached the goſpel in various parts of the world, enlarging the kingdom of his great maſter, and ſpreading the glad tidings of ſalvation among the inhabitants of various countries; and among the reſt thoſe of Rome, then the miſtreſs of the world. In that capital he is ſaid to have continued ſeveral years, till the emperor Claudius, taking advantage of ſome ſeditious tumults raiſed by the Jews, publiſhed an edict, whereby they were baniſhed from Rome, and among the reſt St. Peter, who returned to Jeruſalem, and was preſent at the ſynod already mentioned. But how long he continued in the capital of Judea is uncertain; for we have no account of his tranſactions for many years. This, however, is certain, that he was not idle in the ſervice of his great Maſter; and Euſebius tells us, from Metaphraſtus, that he viſited ſeveral of the weſtern parts, and particularly this iſland of Great Britain; where he continued ſeveral years, ſpreading the glad tidings of ſalvation in theſe remote parts, and converting the ſeveral nations to the chriſtian faith.

But however this be, whether St. Peter was, or was not, in England, it is certain, that towards the latter end of Nero's reign he returned to Rome, where he found the minds of the people ſtrangely bewitched and hardened againſt the doctrines of the Goſpel, by the ſorceries of Simon Magus, who, as we have already obſerved, was chaſtiſed by Peter, for his wickedneſs at Samaria. This monſter

monſter of impiety not only oppoſed the preaching of the apoſtles, but alſo did all in his power to render them and their doctrine odious to the emperor. St. Peter, foreſeeing that the calumnies of Simon and his adherents would haſten his death, took the greater pains, and was ſtill more aſſiduous to confirm thoſe he had been any ways inſtrumental in converting to the ſublime truths they had received. And in order to this, he ſtrongly oppoſed the great deceiver of mankind: for in the laſt years of his life, he ſeems to have wrote his two epiſtles to the diſperſed Jews in Pontus, Galatia, Capadocia, and Bythinia: and in an appointed encounter with Simon, diſcovered his magical impoſtures, and through the power and aſſiſtance of the Almighty, brought him to an exemplary and miſerable death.

This happened in the following manner: the apoſtle meeting with Simon at Rome, and finding him ſtill pretending to be ſome great perſon, even the promiſed Meſſiah, he could not help oppoſing zealouſly his preſumptuous arrogancies. But Simon, more incenſed by the oppoſition, offered to give the people ſuch an evident demonſtration of his being what he pretended, that he would place the whole beyond contradiction, by immediately aſcending up to heaven. Upon this, by the help of two pretended inviſible devils, as in a chariot of fire, he raiſed himſelf from the earth, and ſeemed to be flying towards the regions of heaven. St. Peter and St. Paul beholding the deluſion, had recourſe to prayers, and obtained their petitions of the Almighty, namely, that the impoſtor ſhould be ſoon diſcovered, for the honour of the bleſſed Jeſus. Accordingly he fell headlong to the ground; by which he was ſo bruiſed, that he died in a very ſhort time.

Such was the end of this miſerable, this unhappy man; but the news of it no ſooner reached the emperor's ears, than he vowed revenge, both for the death of his favourite, and the endeavours uſed by the apoſtles "to turn mankind from darkneſs unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Accordingly he iſſued orders for apprehending St. Peter, together with his companion St. Paul. St. Ambroſe tells us, that when the people perceived the danger to which St. Peter was now expoſed, they prayed him to quit Rome, and repair for awhile to ſome ſecure retreat, that his life might be preſerved for the benefit of the church.

Peter,

Peter, with great reluctance, yielded to their intreaties, and made his escape by night; but as he passed the gate, he was met by a person in the form of his great and beloved Master, and on his asking him whither he was going, answered, to Rome, to be crucified a second time: which Peter taking for a reproof of his cowardice, returned again into the city, and was soon after apprehended, and cast together with St. Paul, into the Mamertine prison. Here they were confined eight or nine months, but spent their time in the exercise of religion, especially in preaching to the prisoners, and those who resorted to them. And during this confinement, it is generally thought, St. Peter wrote the second Epistle to the dispersed Jews, wherein he endeavours to confirm them in the belief and practice of Christianity, and to fortify them against those poisonous and pernicious principles and actions, which even then began to break in upon the Christian church.

Nero, at length returning from Acaia, entered Rome in triumph; and, soon after his arrival, resolved that the apostles should fall as victims and sacrifices to his cruelty and revenge. While the fatal stroke was daily expected, the Christians in Rome were continually offering up their prayers to heaven to protect those two holy persons. But the Almighty was now willing to put an end to their sorrows; and after sealing the truth they had preached with their own blood, to receive them into the regions of eternal bliss and happiness, and exchange their crowns of martyrdom for crowns of glory. Accordingly they were both condemned by the cruel emperor of Rome; and St. Peter having taken his farewel of the brethren, especially of St. Paul, was taken from the prison, and led to the top of the Vatican mount, near the Tiber, where he was sentenced to surrender up his life on the cross.

At his coming to the place of execution, he begged the favour of the officers, that he might not be crucified in the common manner, but with his head downward; affirming, that he was unworthy to suffer in the same posture in which his Lord had suffered before him. This request was accordingly complied with: and the great apostle St. Peter surrendered up his soul into the hands of his great and beneficent Master, who came down from heaven to ransom mankind from destruction, and open

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for them the gates of the heavenly Canaan.

His body, being taken down from the croſs, is ſaid to have been embalmed by Marcellinus, the preſbyter, after the manner of the Jews, and then buried in the Vatican, near the Appian way, two miles from Rome.

Here it remained till the time of pope Cornelius, who re-conveyed it to Rome, where it reſted in an obſcure place, till the reign of Conſtantine, who, from the great reverence he entertained for the chriſtian religion, erected many churches at Rome, and rebuilt and greatly enlarged the Vatican in honour of St. Peter. He alſo conſiderably enriched the church with gifts and ornaments; and it has continued increaſing in riches and ſplendor every age, till it is become one of the wonders of the world.

If we conſider St. Peter as a man, there ſeems to have been a natural eagerneſs predominant in his temper, which animated his ſoul to the moſt bold, and ſometimes raſh undertakings, It was this, in a great meaſure, that prompted him to be ſo very forward to ſpeak, and to return anſwers ſometimes before he had well conſidered them. It was this that made him expoſe his perſon to the moſt imminent dangers, promiſe thoſe great things in behalf of his maſter, reſolutely draw his ſword in his quarrel againſt a whole band of ſoldiers, and wound a ſervant of the high-prieſt; nay, he had, in all probability, attempted greater things, had not his Lord reſtrained his impetuoſity, and given a ſeaſonable check to his fury.

If we conſider him as a diſciple of the bleſſed Jeſus, we ſhall find him exemplary in the great duties of religion. His humility and lowlineſs of mind were remarkable. With what a paſſionate earneſtneſs on the conviction of a miracle, did he beg of our bleſſed Saviour to depart from him: thinking it unworthy the Son of God to come near ſo vile a ſinner!

When the great Redeemer of mankind, by that amazing condeſcenſion, ſtooped ſo low as to waſh the feet of his diſciples, Peter could not be perſuaded to admit his performing it, thinking it highly improper that ſo great a perſon ſhould ſubmit to ſuch a ſervile office towards a perſon ſo mean as himſelf; nor could he be induced to admit of it till his great Maſter threatened to deprive him of his favour.

When Cornelius, the Roman cen-

turion, heightened in this opinion of him, by an immediate command from the Almighty concerning him, would have treated him with more than ordinary marks of eſteem and veneration, he was ſo far from complying with it, that he declared he was nothing more than a mortal like himſelf. His love and zeal for his maſter were remarkable; he thought he could never expreſs either at too high a rate; venturing on the greateſt perils, and expoſing his life to the moſt imminent dangers. His forwardneſs to own his great Maſter for the Meſſiah and Son of the Moſt High, was remarkably great; and it was this that drew from his Lord that honourable encomium, "Bleſſed art thou Simon Bar-jona." But his courage and conſtancy in confeſſing Chriſt, even before his moſt inveterate enemies, was ſtill greater, after he had recovered himſelf from his fall. How plainly does he tell the Jews that they were the murderers and crucifiers of the Lord of Glory? Nay, with what an undaunted courage, with what an heroic greatneſs of ſoul, did he tell the very Sanhedrim, who had ſentenced and condemned him, that they were guilty of his death, and that they had no other way of eſcaping the vengeance of the Almighty, but by the merits of that very Jeſus, whom they had crucified and put to death.

Laſtly, if we conſider him as an apoſtle, as a paſtor, or ſhepherd of the ſouls of men, we ſhall find him faithful and diligent in his office, zealouſly endeavouring to inſtruct the ignorant, reduce the erroneous, ſtrengthen the weak, confirm the ſtrong, reclaim the vicious, and turn the children of men into the paths of righteouſneſs. He never omitted any opportunity of preaching to the people, and ſpreading the glad tidings of the Goſpel among the human race; and ſo powerful were his diſcourſes, that he converted many thouſands at one time. How many painful journies and dangerous voyages did he undertake! with what unconquerable patience did he endure the greateſt trials, ſurmount every difficulty, and remove every diſpoſition, that he might circulate and eſtabliſh the Goſpel of his beloved Maſter! Never refuſing even to lay down his life to promote it. Nor was he aſſiduous only to perform theſe duties himſelf, but was alſo careful to animate others to do the like; earneſtly preſſing and perſuading the paſtors and governors of the church "to feed the flock of God,"

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to labour freely for the good of the ſouls of men, and not undertake thoſe offices to acquire advantages to themſelves; beſeeching them to treat the flock committed to their care with lenity and gentleneſs, and to be themſelves ſhining examples of piety and religion, the ſureſt method of rendering their miniſtry ſucceſsful. And becauſe it was impoſſible for him to be always preſent, to teach and warn the children of men, he endeavoured, by letters, to imprint in their minds the practice of what they had been taught.--A method he tells us he was reſolved to purſue, as long as he continued an inhabitant of this world; thinking it meet, while he was in this tabernacle, to ſtir up, by putting them in mind of theſe things; that ſo, they might be able, after his deceaſe, to have them always in remembrance.

Thus lived, thus died Simon Peter, called to be an apoſtle of Jeſus Chriſt, and at length to offer up his life in ratification of the doctrine he delivered and the faith he maintained and propagated.

Saint PAUL.

CHAP. I.

Account of this Apoſtle from his Birth, till his Converſion to the Chriſtian Faith.

THIS great apoſtle of the Gentiles was a native of Tarſus, and a deſcendant from the ancient ſtock of Abraham. He was born about two years before the bleſſed Jeſus, and belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, the youngeſt ſon of Jacob, who thus propheſied of him; "Benjamin ſhall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he ſhall devour the prey, and at night he ſhall divide the ſpoil:" A prophetical character which Tertullian, and others, will have to be accompliſhed in our apoſtle. For, in his youth, or morning of his days, he perſecuted the churches, deſtroying the flock of the Almighty; he devoured

voured the prey: in his declining age, or evening of his days, he became a physician of the nations, feeding and distributing with the greatest care and assiduity the sheep of Christ, that great shepherd of Israel; he "divideth the spoil."

Tarsus, the place of this apostle's nativity, was the metropolis of Cilicia, and situated about three hundred miles distant from Jerusalem; it was exceeding rich and populous, and a Roman municipium, or free corporation, invested with the privivileges of Rome, by the two first emperors, as a reward for the citizens firm adherence to the Cæsars, in the rebellion of Crassus. St. Paul was therefore born a Roman citizen, and he often pleads this privilege on his trials.

It was common for the inhabitants of Tarsus to send their children into other cities for learning and improvement, especially to Jerusalem, where they were so numerous, that they had a synagogue of their own, called the synagogue of the Cilicians. To this capital our apostle was also sent, and brought up at the feet of that eminent rabbi Gamaliel, in the most exact knowledge of the law of Moses. Nor did he fail to profit by the instructions of that great Master; for he so diligently conformed himself to its precepts, that without boasting, he asserts of himself that touching the righteousness of the law, he was blameless, and defied even his enemies to alledge any thing to the contrary, even in his youth. He joined himself to the sect of the Pharisees, the most strict order of the Jewish religion; but at the same time the proudest, and the greatest enemies to Christ and his holy religion.

With regard to his double capacity, of Jewish extraction, and Roman freedom, he had two names, Saul and Paul, the former Hebrew and the latter Latin. It was common for the descendants of Benjamin to give the name Saul to their children ever after the time of the first king of Israel, who was chosen out of that tribe; and Paul was a name as common among the Romans. We must also consider his trade of tent-making as a part of his education, it being the constant practice of the Jews to bring up their children to some honest calling, that in case of necessity, they might provide for themselves by the labour of their own hands.

Saul having obtained a thorough knowledge of the sciences cultivated by the Jews, and being naturally

turally of a very hot and fiery temper, became a great champion of the law of Moſes, and the tradition of the elders, which he conſidered as ſhewing a zeal for God. This rendered him impatient of all oppoſition to the doctrine and tenets he had imbibed, and a vehement blaſphemer and perſecutor of the Chriſtians, who were commonly reputed the enemies and deſtroyers of the Jewiſh œconomy. We muſt not, however, conſider our apoſtle as guilty of the pride and hypocriſy of the Phariſees; for he declares, that he had ever been careful to act in conformity to the dictates of his conſcience, by which he thought himſelf bound to do many things contrary to the name of Jeſus of Nazareth. It was therefore the prejudices of his education, and the natural warmth of his temper that excited him to thoſe violent perſecutions of the Chriſtians, for which he became ſo famous.

The firſt action we find him engaged in, was the diſputation he and his countrymen had with the martyr Stephen, with regard to the Meſſiah. The Chriſtian was too hard for them in the diſpute; but they were too powerful for him in their civil intereſts: for being enraged at his convincing arguments, they carried him before the high-prieſt, who by falſe accuſations condemned him to death. How far Saul was concerned in this cruel action is impoſſible to ſay; all we know is, that he "kept the raiment of them that ſlew him."

The ſtorm of perſecution againſt the church being thus begun, it increaſed prodigiouſly, and the poor Chriſtians of Jeruſalem were miſerably harraſſed and diſperſed. In this perſecution our apoſtle was a principal agent, ſearching all the adjacent parts for the afflicted ſaints, beating ſome in the ſynagogue, compelling ſome to blaſpheme, confining ſome in priſon, and procuring others to be put to death.

Nor could Jeruſalem and the adjacent parts confine his fiery zeal: he applied to the Sanhedrim, and procured a commiſſion from that court, to extend his perſecution to Damaſcus. How eternally inſatiable is the fury of a miſguided zeal! how reſtleſs and unwearied in its deſigns of cruelty! It had already ſufficiently harraſſed the poor Chriſtians at Jeruſalem; but not content with this, it perſecuted them even to ſtrange cities, even to Damaſcus itſelf, whither many of them had fled for ſhelter, reſolving to bring them back to

Jeruſalem, in order to their puniſhment and execution.

It may not be improper here to obſerve, that the Jewiſh Sanhedrim had not only the power of ſeizing and ſcourging offenders againſt their law within the bounds of their own country, but by the connivance and favour of the Romans, might ſend into other countries, where there were any ſynagogues that acknowledged a dependence in religious affairs upon the council of Jeruſalem, to apprehend them; and accordingly Saul was ſent to Damaſcus to apprehend what Chriſtians he could find in that city, and bring them bound to Jeruſalem.

But the Almighty deſigned to employ him in a work of a very different nature, and accordingly ſtopped him on his journey. For as he was travelling between Jeruſalem and Damaſcus, to execute the commiſſion of the Jewiſh Sanhedrim, a refulgent light, far exceeding the brightneſs of the ſun, darted upon him; at which both he and his companions were greatly amazed and confounded, falling, together with their horſes, proſtrate on the ground. Amidſt this confuſion, a voice was heard, in the Hebrew language, ſaying, "Saul, Saul, why perſecuteſt thou me?" To which Saul replied, "Who art thou, Lord?" And was immediately anſwered, "I am Jeſus of Nazareth, whom thou perſecuteſt: It is hard for thee to kick againſt the pricks." As if the bleſſed Jeſus had ſaid, All thy attempts to extirpate the faith in me will prove abortive, and, like kicking againſt the ſpikes, wound and torment thyſelf.

Saul was ſufficiently convinced of his folly in acting againſt Jeſus, whom he was now aſſured to be the true Meſſiah, and aſked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" On which the bleſſed Jeſus informed him of the true intention of his appearance, "ariſe, (ſaid he) and ſtand upon thy feet, for I have appeared unto thee for this purpoſe, to make thee a miniſter and a witneſs, both of thoſe things in the which I will appear unto thee, delivering thee from the Gentiles, unto whom n w I ſend thee to open their eyes, and turn them from darkneſs to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; that they may receive forgiveneſs of ſins, and inheritance among them that are ſanctified by faith that is in me." And for farther inſtruction, the immaculate Jeſus referred him to one of his followers, named Ananias.

Ananias, commanding him to repair immediately to the city.

The company that were with him heard the voice, but did not ſee the perſon who ſpake from heaven. In all probability they were ignorant of the Hebrew language, and therefore only heard a confuſed ſound; for the apoſtle himſelf tells us, that "they heard not the voice of him that ſpake," that is, they did not underſtand what was ſpoken.

The apoſtle now aroſe from the earth; but found himſelf deprived of ſight, the reſplendant brightneſs of the viſion being too intenſe for mortal eyes to behold. His companions therefore led him by the hand to the city of Damaſcus, where he entered the houſe of Judas, and remained there three days without ſight, nor did he either eat or drink, but ſpent his time in prayer to the Almighty, beſeeching him to pardon the ſins of his ignorance and blinded zeal.

In the mean time our bleſſed Saviour appeared in a viſion to Ananias, a very devout and religious man, highly eſteemed by all the inhabitants of Damaſus, though he profeſſed the religion of the crucified Jeſus, commanding him to go into ſuch a ſtreet in the city, and enquire in the houſe of Judas, for one Saul of Tarſus, then offering up the moſt fervent prayers to the throne of God.

Ananias, who was ever ready to obey the commands of the Moſt High, ſtarted at the name, having heard of his bloody practices at Jeruſalem, and what commiſſion he was now come to execute in Damaſcus. He therefore ſuſpected that his pretended converſion was nothing more than a ſnare artfully laid for the Chriſtians. But our bleſſed Saviour ſoon removed his apprehenſions, by telling him, that his ſuſpicions were entirely deſtitude of foundation; and that he had now taken him as a choſen veſſel to preach the Goſpel both to the Jews and Gentiles, and even before the greateſt monarchs of the earth; acquainting him, at the ſame time, with the great things he ſhould do and ſuffer for the ſake of the Goſpel, what chains and impriſonments, what racks and ſcourges, what hunger and thirſt, what ſhipwrecks, and at laſt even death itſelf, he ſhould undergo.

This quieted the fears of Ananias, who immediately obeyed the heavenly viſion, repaired to the houſe of Judas, and laid hands upon Saul, ſaying, "That Jeſus who appeared to thee in the way, hath ſent me to reſtore

reſtore thy ſight, and, by the infuſion of his ſpirit, to give thee the knowledge of thoſe truths, which thou haſt blindly and ignorantly perſecuted; but who now is willing to receive thee by baptiſm, into his church, and make thee a member of his body." This ſpeech was no ſooner pronounced, than there fell from his eyes thick films, reſembling ſcales, and he received his ſight; and after baptiſm converſed freely with the Chriſtians of Damaſcus. Nor did he only converſe with them; he alſo, to the great aſtoniſhment of the whole church, preached the goſpel to thoſe Chriſtians he came down with an intention to deſtroy, boldly aſſerting, "that Jeſus was the Chriſt, the Son of God; and proving it to the Jews with ſuch demonſtrative evidence, that they were confounded, and found it impoſſible for them to anſwer him.

CHAP. II.

Continuation of the Life of St. Paul, from the Time of his Converſion, till the Council was held at Jeruſalem.

THE miraculous convert, at the inſtance of the divine command, retired into Arabia Petræa, where he received a full revelation of all the myſteries of Chriſtianity: for he himſelf declares, that he converſed with fleſh and blood. Having preached in ſeveral parts of that country ſome time, he returned again to Damaſcus, applying himſelf, with the utmoſt aſſiduity, to the great work of the miniſtry, frequenting the ſynagogues there, powerfully confuting the objections commonly made by the deſcendents of Jacob againſt Jeſus of Nazareth, and converting great numbers of Jews and Gentiles.

He was, indeed, remarkably zealous in his preaching, and bleſſed with a very extraordinary method of reaſoning, whereby he proved the fundamental points of Chriſtianity beyond exception. This irritated the Jews to the higheſt degree; and at length, after two or three years continuance in thoſe parts, they found means to prevail on the governor of Damaſus to have him put to death. But they knew it would be difficult to take him, as he had ſo many friends in the city; they therefore kept themſelves in a continual watch, ſearched all the houſes where they ſuppoſed he might conceal himſelf, and alſo obtained a guard from the governor to obſerve the gates, in order to prevent his eſcaping from them.

In this diſtreſs his Chriſtian friends were

were far from deſerting him: they tried every method that offered to procure his eſcape; but finding it impoſſible for him to paſs through either of the gates of the city, they let him down from one of their houſes through a window into a baſket, over the wall, by which means the cruel deſigns of his enemies were rendered abortive.

Having thus eſcaped from his malicious perſecutors, he repaired to Jeruſalem, and, on his arrival, addreſſed himſelf tothe church. But they at firſt ſhunned his company, till Barnabas brought him to Peter, who was not yet caſt into priſon, and to James the Lord's brother, biſhop of Jeruſalem, informing them of his miraculous converſion, and that he had preached the Goſpel with the greateſt boldneſs in the ſynagogue of Damaſcus; upon which they gladly received him, and familiarly entertained him fifteen days.

During this interval he was remarkably aſſiduous in preaching the Goſpel of the Son of God, and confuting the Helleniſt Jews with the greateſt courage and reſolution. But ſnares were ſoon laid for him, as malice can as eaſily ceaſe to be, as to remain inactive. Being warned by God in a viſion, that his teſtimony would not be received at Jeruſalem, he thought proper to depart and preach the Goſpel to the Gentiles. Accordingly, being conducted by the brethren to Cæſarea Phillippi, he ſet ſail for Tarſus, his native city; from whence he was ſoon after brought by Barnabas to Antioch, to aſſiſt him in propagating Chriſtianity in that city.

In this employment he ſpent one whole year, and had the pleaſure of ſeeing the Goſpel flouriſh in a very remarkable manner.

It was in this city that the diſciples firſt acquired the name of Chriſtians, before which they were ſtiled Nazarenes; but this appellation ſoon prevailed all over the world, and the former was, in a few ages, almoſt entirely forgotten.

About this time a terrible famine, foretold by Agabus, happened in ſeveral parts of the Roman empire, particularly Judea, which induced the Chriſtians at Antioch to compaſſionate the miſeries of their brethren at Jeruſalem. They accordingly raiſed conſiderable contributions for their relief, which they ſent to the capital of Judea by the hands of Barnabas and Saul, who immediately after executing their commiſſion, returned to Antioch. But while they were performing the public exerciſes

of religion, it was revealed to them by the Holy Ghoſt, that they ſhould ſet apart Barnabas and Saul, to preach the Goſpel in other places; which was accordingly done, and they were immediately deputed for that ſervice by prayer, faſting, and the impoſition of hands.

The firſt place they viſited was Seleucia, where they did not continue long, but ſailed for Cyprus; and at Salamis, a great city in that iſland, they preached in the ſynagoge of the Jews. From hence they removed to Paphos, the reſidence of Sergius Paulus, the proconſul of the iſland, a man of great wiſdom and prudence, but miſerably ſeduced by the wicked artifices of Bar-Jeſus, a Jewiſh impoſtor, who ſtiled himſelf Elymas, or the magician, vehemently oppoſed the apoſtles, and kept the proconſul from embracing the faith.

The proconſul, however called for the apoſtles, who after ſeverely checking Elymas for his malicious oppoſition to the truth, told him the divine vengeance was now ready to ſeize upon him; and immediately he was deprived of his ſight. The vengeance of the Almighty was remarkably proportioned in this puniſhment by depriving him of his bodily eyes, who had ſo wilfully and maliciouſly ſhut thoſe of his mind againſt the light of the Goſpel, and alſo endeavoured to keep others in darkneſs and ignorance. This miracle convinced the proconſul of the truth of the doctrines taught by the apoſtles, and made him a convert to the faith.

St. Paul, after this remarkable ſucceſs in Cyprus, repaired to Phrygia in Pamphilla, and taking Litus with him, in the room of Mark, who was gone to Jeruſalem, travelled to Antioch, the metropolis of Piſidia.

Soon after their arrival, they entered the ſynagogue of the Jews on the ſabbath day, and after the reading of the law, Paul, being invited by the rulers of the ſynagogue, delivered himſelf in the following manner: "Hearken, all ye deſcendants of Jacob, and ye that fear the Almighty, to the words of my mouth. The God of Iſrael made choice of our fathers, and loved them, when they had no city of their own to dwell in, but were ſtrangers and ſlaves in Egypt, bringing them from thence with a mighty hand, and a ſtretched-out arm; fed them in the wilderneſs forty years, and would not ſuffer his anger to ariſe againſt them, though they often provoked him in the deſert. On their arrival in the land he promiſed their fathers, he

he deſtroyed the nations that inhabited it, and placed them in that fruitful country; dividing it to them by lot.

"When they were ſettled in the land, he gave them judges during four hundred and fifty years, till Samuel the prophet. But on their deſiring a king, he placed over them Saul the ſon of Cis, a Benjamite, who reigned about forty years. After his death he placed David on the throne of Iſrael, giving him this teſtimony, "I have found David the ſon of Jeſſe, a man after mine own heart, which ſhall fulfil all my will." And according to his promiſe the Almighty hath raiſed up to the ſons of David a Saviour Jeſus, "which is Chriſt, the Lord; the Baptiſm of repentance having been preached before his coming by John. And as his forerunner executed his office, he aſked his followers, "whom think ye that I am? You muſt not miſtake me for the Meſſiah; he will ſoon follow me: but I am not worthy to perform the meaneſt office for him.

"To you, therefore, ye deſcendants of Abraham, and all others who fear the Almighty, is this word of ſalvation ſent. For the inhabitants of Jeruſalem, and rulers of Iſrael, being ignorant of him, and the voices of the prophets, though read every ſabbath in their ſynagogues, fulfilled their predictions by condemning the immaculate ſon of the Moſt High. They found, indeed, no fault in him, though they earneſtly deſired Pilate that he might be ſlain.

"When every thing that had been written by the prophets concerning him was fulfilled, they took him from the tree, and depoſited his body in the chambers of the grave. But death had no power to detain him: his Almighty Father raiſed him from the habitations of the dead. After which, he was ſeen during many days by his diſciples who attended him from Galilee, and were the witneſſes choſen by Omnipotence, of theſe great and miraculous works. And we now declare unto you glad tidings, namely, That the promiſe made by the Almighty to our forefathers, he hath performed to us their children by raiſing Jeſus from the dead. The prophet David alſo ſaid "Thou art my ſon, this day have I begotten thee." He alſo foretold, that he ſhould return from the chambers of the duſt, and no more be ſubject to corruption: "I will give him, ſaid he, the ſure mercies of David. And again, Thou ſhalt not

ſuffer

ſuffer thine holy one to ſee corruption." Now this prophecy muſt relate to the Meſſiah, for David himſelf, after he had ſwayed the ſcepter of Iſrael a certain time, fell aſleep, was depoſited in the chambers of the grave, and his fleſh ſaw corruption: but the great ſon of David, whom the Almighty raiſed from the dead, never ſaw corruption.

"Be it therefore known unto you, men and brethren, that through this Saviour is preached unto you the forgiveneſs of ſins. It is by his merits we are juſtified from all things, which was impoſſible by the law of Moſes. Be careful, therefore, leſt what was foretold by the prophets come upon you, "Behold, ye deſpiſers, and wonder and periſh: for I work a work in your days, a work which you ſhall in no wiſe believe, though a man declare it unto you."

This ſpirited addreſs of the great apoſtle carried with it its own weight, and obtained, from the converted Jews, a requeſt that it ſhould again be delivered the enſuing ſabbath; when almoſt the whole city flocked to hear the apoſtles; at which the Jews were filled with envy, and contradicted Paul, uttering many blaſphemous expreſſions againſt the name of Jeſus of Nazareth. But their oppoſition could not daunt the apoſtles, who boldly declared, that our bleſſed Saviour had charged them to preach the Goſpel firſt to the Jews, but as they ſo obſtinately rejected it, they were now to addreſs themſelves to the Gentiles; who hearing this, rejoiced exceedingly, magnifying the words of the Almighty, and many of them embraced the doctrines of the Goſpel.

This increaſed the malice and fury of the Jews, who, by falſe and artful inſinuations, prevailed on ſome of the more bigotted and honourable women to bring over their huſbands to their party; by which means Paul and Barnabas were driven out of the city. At which the apoſtles departed, ſhaking off the duſt from their feet, as a teſtimony of the ſenſe they had of the ingratitude and infidelity of the Jews.

From Antioch they went to Iconium, the metropolis of Lyaconia, a province of the leſſer Aſia, where they again entered into the ſynagogue of the Jews, notwithſtanding the ill-treatment they had met with from the Jews in other places; for ſo great was their zeal for the Goſpel, that they were not to be deterred from preaching it by ill uſage, however great. Therefore, according

ing to their uſual method, they again began their preaching in the aſſembly of Iſraelites, and the Almighty ſo far aſſiſted their endeavours, that many, both Jews and proſelytes, believed. Their ſucceſs encouraged them to continue a conſiderable time in this city, to inſtruct the converts, and confirm their faith by miracles. But though they had gained a conſiderable part of the city to the faith, yet many continued in their infidelity: the old leaven of Jewiſh malice began again to ferment, and the unbelieving Jews, having ſtirred up the Gentiles againſt the apoſtles, at laſt prevailed on the multitude to ſtone them. But the apoſtles having timely notice of their deſign, fled from the city and travelled to Lyſtra, where they preached the Goſpel to the inhabitants, and thoſe who dwelt in the adjacent country.

Among the converts at Lyſtra, was a man who had been lame from his mother's womb, and never had walked. But Paul, perceiving that he had faith to be ſaved, thought proper to add the cure of his body to that of his ſoul, knowing that it would not only be beneficial to him, but to all the reſt of the believers, by confirming their faith. And that the miracle might be wrought in the moſt conſpicuous manner, he, in the midſt of the congregation, ſaid, in an audible voice, to the man, "Stand upright on thy feet." And the words were no ſooner pronounced, than his ſtrength was at once reſtored, and he leaped up and walked.

The people who beheld this miracle, well knew that it was not wrought by any human power; but having been initiated into the ſuperſtitious cuſtoms of the heathens, they cried out, "The gods are come down to us in the likeneſs of men." Accordingly they called Barnabas, Jupiter, becauſe of his venerable gravity, and Paul, Mercury from his eloquence. Nor was it long before the whole city reſounded with acclamations; ſo that almoſt all the inhabitants gathered themſelves together, and, preceded by the prieſt of Jupiter, and oxen dreſſed in garlands, they came to the houſe where the apoſtles were, intending to do ſacrifice to them. But as ſoon as Barnabas and Paul underſtood their intentions, they were greatly affected at this ſuperſtitious attempt; and renting their clothes to expreſs their grief and abhorrence of the action, ran to them, crying out, "Ye men of Lyſtra, ye are miſtaken in the object of your worſhip; for though we have done many mi-

racles in the name, and by the power of Chriſt, yet we are no more than men, and ſubject to the ſame paſſions with yourſelves, and preach unto you the glad tidings of ſalvation, that ye may forſake the vanities of this world, and turn to the living God, who created the heaven and the earth, the ſea, and all the creatures they contain. This omnipotent Being ſuffered all nations formerly to walk in their own ways, though he never left himſelf without witneſs, doing the greateſt good to the children of men; it is he that ſendeth rain from heaven, and crowneth the year with fruitful ſeaſons, filling our hearts with joy and gladneſs."

This argument of the apoſtles had the deſired effect; and the people were at laſt, though with difficulty, perſuaded to lay aſide their intended idolatrous ſacrifice. And ſurely no argument could be more proper to affect the minds of his audience. Is it poſſible to ſurvey the ſeveral parts of the creation, and not diſcover, in every place, evident traces of an infinite wiſdom, power, and goodneſs? Who can ſurvey univerſal nature, and not at once ſee and admire its great author, who has diſpoſed of all created things with ſuch order and regularity, as to diſplay, in the cleareſt manner, his own power and glory? Behold the ſun, how juſtly is that ſource of light and heat placed in the centre of the planetary choir, that each may enjoy its deſtined ſhare of his prolific beams; ſo that the earth is not burnt by a too near approach, nor chilled by the northern blaſts from too great a receſs; but impregnated with fruits and flowers, by the happy influence of a vital heat, and crowned with luxuriant plenty by the benign influences of the ſeaſon. It is that Omnipotent Being, who "poiſes the balancings of the clouds, that divides a water-courſe for the overflowing of waters, and a way for the lightning of the thunder. Who can bind the ſweet influences of Pleiades, or looſe the bands of Orion? Or, who can bring forth Mazaroth in his ſeaſon, or guide Arcturus with his ſon?" Do theſe happen by chance, or by the ſecret appointment of infinite Wiſdom? who can contemplate the wonderful properties of the air, the great treaſury of vital breath, and not reflect on the divine wiſdom that formed it? If we ſurvey the earth, we there diſcover the footſteps of an Almighty Being, who "ſtretched the north over the empty ſpace, and hangeth the earth upon nothing:"

nothing:" filling it with great variety of admirable and useful creatures, and maintaining them all by the bounty of his hand. It is he that clothes the grass with a delightful verdour, that "crowns the year with his loving kindness, and causes the valleys to stand thick with corn. It is he that maketh the grass to grow upon the mountains, and herb for the service of man." He adorns the lilies of the field that neither toil nor spin, with a glory that excels the pomp and grandeur of Solomon's court. "He shut up the sea with doors, (and said) Hitherto shalt thou come and no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." It is the Almighty Being that arrests the storm, and smooths the tempestuous billows of the deep; that delivereth the mariner from all his troubles, and bringeth the ship into the desired haven of safety. How reasonable, therefore, is it that we should worship and adore this Omnipotent, this kind Creator, and not transfer the honours due to him alone, to frail mortals, much less to dumb idols, the work of men's hands.

The apostles indefatigibly persevered in the execution of their important commission, declaring, wherever they went, the glad tidings of salvation through repentance unto life and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But the malice of the Jews still pursued them; for some of these bigotted Israelites coming from Antioch and Iconium, exasperated and stirred up the multitude; so that those very persons who could hardly be restrained from offering sacrifice to them, now used them like slaves, stoning them in so cruel a manner, that Paul was thought to be dead, and as such they dragged him out of the city; but while the christians of Lystra were attending on his body, probably in order to carry him to the grave, he arose and returned with them into the city; and the next day departed with Barnabas to Derbe, where they preached the Gospel, and converted many; no danger being able to terrify them from the work of the ministry, and publishing the glad tidings of salvation in every place.

They did not however long continue at Derbe, but returned to Lystra, Iconium, Antioch and Pisidia, confirming the christians of those places in the faith, earnestly persuading them to persevere, and not be discouraged with those troubles and persecutions, which they must expect would attend the profession of the gospel.

goſpel. And that the affairs of the Church might be conducted with more regularity, they ordained elders and paſtors, to teach, to inſtruct, and to watch over them; and then left them to the protection of the Almighty, to whoſe care they recommended them by prayer and faſting.

After leaving Antioch they paſſed through Piſidia, and came to Pamphilia: and after preaching the Goſpel at Perga, they went down to Attalia.

Having thus finiſhed the circuit of their miniſtry, they returned back to Antioch in Syria, from whence they at firſt departed. Here they ſummoned the church, and gave them an account of their miniſtry, the ſucceſs it had met in different parts, and how great a door had thus been opened for the converſion of the Gentile world.

While St. Paul continued at Antioch that famous controverſy with regard to the obſervation of the Jewiſh ceremonies in the Chriſtian diſpenſation, was ſet on foot by certain Jewiſh converts, to the great diſturbance of the whole church: and it was determined to ſend Paul and Barnabas to conſult with the apoſtles and church at Jeruſalem, that this affair might be ſettled on the moſt ſolid foundation. On their arrival at Jeruſalem, they firſt addreſſed themſelves to Peter, James and John, the pillars of that church, by whom they were kindly entertained, and admitted to the right hand of fellowſhip: and perceiving by the account given them by St. Paul, that the Goſpel of the uncircumciſion was committed to him as that of the circumciſion was to Peter, they agreed that Peter ſhould preach to the Jews, and Paul to the Gentiles. This being determined, a council was ſummoned, wherein Peter declared his opinion, and Paul and Barnabas acquainted them with the great things God, by their miniſtry, had done among the Gentiles: a plain evidence that they were accepted by the Almighty, though uncircumciſed, as well as the Jews with all their legal rights and privileges: accordingly it was unanimouſly determined that the Gentiles were not under the obligation of the law of Moſes, and therefore that ſome perſons of their own church ſhould be joined with Paul and Barnabas, to carry the decrees of the council to Antioch, for their farther ſatisfaction in this matter. Nothing tends more to impede the progreſs of

of vital religion, than a bigotted attachment to ineſſential forms and modes.

CHAP. III.

Tranſactions of this great Apoſtle, from the Time of the Synod at Jeruſalem, till his Departure from Athens.

THE controverſy concerning the obſervation of Jewiſh ceremonies in the chriſtian church being decided in favour of St. Paul, he and his companions returned back to Antioch; and ſoon after Peter himſelf came down. On reading the decretal epiſtle in the church, the converts converſed freely and inoffenſively with the Gentiles, till ſome of the Jews coming thither from Jeruſalem, Peter withdrew his converſation, as if it had been a thing unwarrantable and unlawful. By ſuch a ſtrange method of proceeding the minds of many were diſſatisfied, and their conſciences very uneaſy. St. Paul, with the greateſt concern, obſerved it, and publicly rebuked Peter, with that ſharpneſs and ſeverity his unwarrantable practice deſerved.

Soon after this diſpute, Paul and Barnabas reſolved to viſit the churches they had planted among the Gentiles, and Barnabas was deſirous of taking with them his couſin Mark; but this Paul ſtrenuouſly oppoſed, as he had left them in their former journey. This trifling diſpute aroſe to ſuch height, that theſe two great apoſtles and fellow labourers in the Goſpel parted; Barnabas, taking Mark with him, repaired to Cyprus his native country, and Paul having made choice of Silas, and recommended the ſucceſs of his undertaking to the care of Divine Providence ſet forward on his intended jonrney.

They firſt viſited the churches of Syria and Cilicia confirming the people in the faith by their inſtructions and exhortations. Hence they ſailed to Crete, where Paul preached the Goſpel, and conſtituted Titus to be the firſt biſhop and paſtor of the iſland, leaving him to ſettle thoſe affairs of the church which time would not permit the apoſtle to ſettle himſelf. From hence Paul and Silas returned back into Cilicia, and came to Lyſtra, where they found Timothy, whoſe father was a Greek, but his mother a Jewiſh convert, and by her he had been brought up under all the advantages of a pious and religious education, eſpecially with regard to the holy ſcriptures which he had ſtudied with the greateſt aſſiduity and ſucceſs. This perſon St. Paul deſigned for

the companion of his travels, and a ſpecial inſtrument in the miniſtry of the Goſpel. But knowing that his being uncircumciſed would prove a ſtumbling block to the Jews, he cauſed him to be circumciſed; being willing, in lawful indifferent matters, to conform himſelf to the tempers and apprehenſions of men, in order to ſave their ſouls. In this inſtance the apoſtles evinced much prudence, well knowing that inveterate prejudices in religious matters are not eaſily overcome; for which reaſon he is ſaid to become all things to all men.

Every thing being ready for their journey, St. Paul and his companions departed from Lyſtra, paſſing through Phrygia and the country of Galatia, where the apoſtle was entertained with the greateſt kindneſs and veneration, the people looking upon him as an angel ſent immediately from heaven; and being by revelation forbidden to go into Aſia, he was commanded by a ſecond viſion, to repair to Macedonia, to preach the Goſpel. Accordingly, our apoſtle prepared to paſs from Aſia into Europe.

Here St. Luke joined them, and became, ever after, the inſeparable companion of St. Paul, who being deſirous of finding the ſpeedieſt paſſage into Macedonia, took ſhip with his companions Silas, Luke, and Timothy, and came to Samothracia, an iſland in the Ægean ſea, not far from Thrace; and the next day he went to Neapolis, a part of Macedonia. Leaving Neapolis, they repaired to Philippi, the metropolis of that part of Macedonia, and a Roman colony, where they ſtayed ſome days.

In this city, Paul, according to his conſtant practice, preached in a Proſeucha, or oratory of the Jews, which ſtood by the river ſide, at ſome diſtance from the city, and was much frequented by the devout women of their religion, who met there to pray and hear the law. To theſe St. Paul preached the glad tidings of the Goſpel; and by the influence of the Holy Spirit converted many, eſpecially a certain woman named Lydia, a Jewiſh proſelyte, a ſeller of a purple in that city, but a native of Thyatira. This woman, being baptized with her whole family, was ſo importunate with St. Paul and his companions to abide at her houſe, that they were conſtrained to accept of her entertainment.

During the time of the apoſtles reſiding in this city, they continued their daily courſe of worſhipping at the

the ſame oratory: and after ſeveral days, as they were repairing to the ſame place of devotion, there met him a damſel who had a prophetic ſpirit of divination, by whom her maſters acquired very great advantage. This woman followed Paul and his companions, crying out, "Theſe men are the ſervants of the moſt High God, which ſhew unto us the way of ſalvation. Paul, at firſt, took no notice of her, not being willing to multiply miracles without neceſſity. But when he ſaw her following them ſeveral days together, he began to be troubled; and in imitation of his great Maſter, who would not ſuffer the devil to acknowledge him, leſt his falſe and lying tongue ſhould prejudice the truth in the minds of men, commanding the ſpirit, in the name of Jeſus, to come out of her. The evil ſpirit with reluctance obeyed, and left the damſel that very inſtant.

This miraculous cure proving a great loſs to her maſters, who acquired large gains from her ſoothſaying, they were filled with malice and envy againſt the apoſtles; and by their inſtigation the multitude aroſe, and ſeizing upon Paul and his companions, hurried them before the magiſtrates and governors of the colony; accuſing them of introducing many innovations which were prejudicial to the ſtate, and unlawful for them to comply with, as being Romans.

The magiſtrates being concerned for the tranquillity of the ſtate, and jealous of all diſturbances, were very forward to puniſh the offenders, againſt whom the whole multitude teſtified; and therefore commanded the officers to ſtrip them, and ſcourge them ſeverely as ſeditious perſons.

This was accordingly executed; after which the apoſtles were committed to cloſe ſtudy, the gaoler receiving more than ordinary charge to keep them ſafely; and he accordingly thruſt them into the inner priſon, and made their feet faſt in the ſtocks. But the moſt obſcure dungeon, or the pitchly mantle of the night, cannot intercept the beams of divine joy and comfort from the ſouls of pious men. Their minds were all ſerenity; and at midnight they prayed and ſung praiſes ſo loud, that they were heard in every part of the priſon. Nor were their prayers offered to the throne of grace in vain: an earthquake ſhook the foundations of the priſon, opened the doors, looſed the chains, and ſet the priſoners at liberty,

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This convulſion of nature rouſed the gaoler from his ſleep; and concluding from what he ſaw, that all his priſoners were eſcaped, he was going to put a period to his life! but Paul obſerving him, haſtily cried out, "Do thyſelf no harm, for we are all here. The keeper was now as greatly ſurpriſed at the goodneſs of the apoſtles, as he was before terrified at the thoughts of their eſcape: and calling for a light, he came immediately into the preſence of the apoſtles, fell down at their feet, took them from the dungeon, brought them to his own houſe, waſhed their ſtripes, and begged of them to inſtruct him in the knowledge of that God who was ſo mighty to ſave.

St. Paul readily granted his requeſt, and replied, That, if he believed in Jeſus Chriſt, he might be ſaved, with his whole houſe: accordingly the gaoler, with all his family, were, after a competent inſtruction, baptized, and received as members of the church of Chriſt! How happy a change does the doctrine of the Goſpel make in the minds of men! How does it ſmooth the rougheſt tempers, and inſtil the ſweeteſt principles of civility and good-nature into the minds of men. he who, but a few moments before, tyrannized over the apoſtles with the moſt cruel uſage, now treats them with the greateſt reſpect, and the higheſt marks of kindneſs.

As ſoon as it was day, the magiſtrates either hearing what had happened, or reflecting on what they had done as too harſh and unjuſtifiable, ſent their ſerjeant to the gaoler with orders to diſcharge the apoſtles. The gaoler joyfully delivered the meſſage and bid them "depart in peace;" but Paul, that he might make the magiſtrates ſenſible what injury they had done them, and how unjuſtly they had puniſhed them, without examination or trial, ſent them word, that, as they thought proper to ſcourge and impriſon Romans contrary to the laws of the empire, he expected they ſhould come themſelves, and make them ſome ſatisfaction.

The magiſtrates were terrified at this meſſage; well knowing how dangerous it was to provoke the formidable power of the Romans, who never ſuffered any freeman to be beaten uncondemned; they came therefore to the priſon, and very ſubmiſſively intreated the apoſtles to depart without any farther diſturbance.

This ſmall recompence for the cruel

cruel uſage they had received was accepted by the meek followers of the bleſſed Jeſus; they left the priſon, and retired to the houſe of Lydia, where they comforted their brethren with an account of their deliverance, and departed; having laid the foundation of a very eminent church, as appears from St. Paul's epiſtle to the Philippians.

Leaving Philippi, Paul and his companions continued their journey towards the weſt, till they came to Theſſalonica, the Metropolis of Macedonia, about an hundred and twenty miles from Philippi. On their arrival at Theſſalonica, Paul, according to his cuſtom, went into the ſynagogue of the Jews, and preached unto his countrymen; the ungrateful uſage he had met with in other places, not diſcouraging him from perſevering in ſo glorious a work. His doctrine, however, was ſtrenuouſly oppoſed by the Jews, who would not allow Jeſus to be the Meſſiah becauſe of his ignominious death.

During the ſtay of the apoſtle at Theſſalonica, they lodged in the houſe of a certain chriſtian named Jaſon, who entertained them very courteouſly. But the Jews would not ſuffer the apoſtles to continue at reſt. They refuſed to embrace the goſpel themſelves, and therefore envied its ſucceſs, and determined to oppoſe its progreſs. Accordingly, they gathered together a great number of lewd and wicked wretches, who beſet the houſe of Jaſon intending to take Paul, and deliver him up to an incenſed multitude. But in this they were diſappointed, Paul and Silas being removed from thence by the Chriſtians, and concealed in ſome other part of the city.

Their fury however was rather exaſperated than leſſened at loſing their prey; and, as they could not find the apoſtles of the bleſſed Jeſus, they determined to be revenged on Jaſon, who had concealed them: accordingly they ſeized on him, with ſome others of the brethren, and carried them before the magiſtrates of the city, accuſing them, as they had before done the apoſtles themſelves at Philippi, of diſturbing the peace of the empire, and ſetting up Jeſus as a king, in derogation of the emperor's dignity and authority. This accuſation induced both the people and magiſtrates to be their enemies; and though Jaſon was only accuſed of harbouring thoſe innovators, yet the magiſtrates could not be prevailed upon to diſmiſs him

and his companions, till they had given ſecurity for their appearance.

As ſoon as the tumult was over, the Theſſalonians, who had been converted by them, ſent away Paul and Silas by night to Beræa, a city about fifty miles ſouth of Theſſalonica, but out of the power of their enemies. Here alſo Paul's great love for his countrymen the Jews, and his earneſt deſire of their ſalvation, excited him to preach to them in particular: accordingly, he entered into their ſynagogue, and explained the goſpel unto them, proving out of the ſcriptures of the Old Teſtament the truth of the doctrines he advanced. The Jews were of a more ingenious and candid temper, than thoſe of Theſſalonica; and as they heard him with great reverence and attention expound and apply the ſcriptures, ſo they ſearched diligently, whether his proofs were proper and pertinent, and conſonant to the ſenſe of the texts he referred to: and having found every thing to be agreeable to what Paul had advanced, many of them believed; and ſeveral Gentiles, following their example, became obedient to the faith, among whom were ſeveral women of quality. The news of this remarkable ſucceſs, was carried to Theſſalonica, and greatly incenſed the inveterate enemies of the Goſpel there, who accordingly repaired to Beræa, and raiſed tumults againſt the apoſtle; ſo that Paul, to avoid their fury, was forced to leave the town; but Silas and Timotheus, either leſs known, or leſs envied, continued ſtill there.

Paul leaving Beræa under the conduct of certain guides, it was pretended, he deſigned to retire by ſea out of Greece, that his reſtleſs enemies might ceaſe their perſecution; but the guides, according to Paul's order, brought him to Athens, and left him there, after receiving from him an order for Silas and Timotheus to repair to him as ſoon as poſſible.

While St. Paul continued at Athens, expecting the arrival of Silas and Timothy, he walked up and down, to take a more accurate ſurvey of the city, which he found miſerably over-run with ſuperſtition and idolatry. The inhabitants were remarkably religious and devout; they had a great number of gods, whom they adored; falſe, indeed, they were, but ſuch as they, being deſtitute of revelation, accounted true; and ſo very careful were they, that no deity ſhould want

want due honour from them, that they had an altar inſcribed, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. A great variety of reaſons are given for this inſcription: ſome affirm that it was the name which the Pagans generally gave to the God of the Jews; but others think that it included all the gods of Aſia, Europe and Africa, beſides the unknown God.

Theſe ſuperſtitious practices grieved the ſpirit of the apoſtle; accordingly, he exerted all his ſtrength for their converſion; he diſputed on the ſabbath-days in the ſynagogues of the Jews; and at other times took all opportunities of preaching to the Athenians the coming of the Meſſiah to ſave the world.

This doctrine was equally new and ſtrange to the Athenians; and though they did not perſecute him as the Jews did, yet his preaching Jeſus was conſidered by the Epicurean and Stoic philoſophers as a fabulous legend; and by the more ſober part as a diſcovery of ſome new gods, which they had not yet placed in their temples: and though they were not unwilling to receive any new deities, yet as the Areopagus, the ſupreme court of the city, was to judge of all gods, to whom public worſhip might be allowed, they brought him before thoſe judges, to give an account of his doctrine.

Paul being placed before the judges of this high aſſembly, readily gave them an account of his doctrine, in a grave and elegant ſpeech; wherein he did not tell them they were horrible and groſs idolators, leſt he ſhould offend them and thereby prevent them from liſtening to his reaſons: but, having commended them for their religious diſpoſitions, he took occaſion from the altar inſcribed to the unknown God, to make a proper defence of his doctrine. "I endeavour (ſaid he) only to explain that altar to you, and manifeſt the nature of that God whom ye ignorantly worſhip. The true God is he that made the world, and all things therein; and who being Lord of all, dwells not in temples made with hands, nor is to be worſhipped in lifeleſs idols." As he is the Creator of all things, he cannot be confined to the workmanſhip of man, whether temples or ſtatues; nor ſtand in need of ſacrifices, ſince he is the fountain of life to all things. He made from one common original, the whole race of mankind, and hath wiſely determined their dependence on him, that they might be obliged

obliged to ſeek after him, and ſerve him. A truth perceivable in the darkeſt ſtate of ignorance, and acknowledged by one of your own poets. If this be the nature of God, it is ſurely the greateſt abſurdity to repreſent him by an image or ſimilitude. The divine patience hath been too much exerciſed already with ſuch groſs abuſes in religion, but now expects a thorough reformation, having ſent his ſon Jeſus Chriſt to make him known to the world, and at the ſame time to inform them, that he hath appointed a day of general judgment, when the religion of mankind ſhall be tried by the teſt of the Goſpel, before his only begotten Son, who is appointed ſole judge of quick and dead, and whoſe commiſſion to that high office hath been ratified by the Almighty in raiſing him from the dead.

On his mentioning the reſurrection, ſome of the philoſophers mocked and derided him; others, more modeſt, but not ſatisfied with the proof he had given, gravely anſwered, "We would hear thee again of this matter." After which Paul departed from the court; but not without ſome ſucceſs, for a few of his auditors believed and attended his inſtructions.

Thus boldly did this intrepid ſervant and ſoldier of Jeſus Chriſt aſſert the cauſe of his divine Maſter, among the great, the wiſe, and the learned, and reaſon with great perſuaſion and eloquence on the nature of God, and the manner in which he has commanded his creatures to worſhip him even in ſpirit and in truth.

CHAP. IV.

Succeſs of St. Paul's Miniſtry at Corinth and Epheſus.

DURING St. Paul's ſtay at Athens, Timothy, according to the order he had received, came to him out of Macedonia; and brought an account that the chriſtians at Theſſalonica were under perſecution from their fellow citizens ever ſince his departure: at which St. Paul was greatly concerned, and at firſt inclined to viſit them in perſon, to confirm them in the faith they had embraced; but being hindered by the enemies of the Goſpel, he ſent Timothy to comfort them, and put them in mind of what they had at firſt heard, namely, that perſecution would be the conſtant attendant on their profeſſion.

On Timothy's departure, St. Paul left Athens, and travelled to Corinth, a very

a very populous place, and famous for its trade. Here he found Aquila, and Priſcilla his wife, lately come from Italy, having been baniſhed from Rome, by the decree of Claudius. And they being of the ſame trade he himſelf had learned in his youth, he wrought with them, that he might not be burdenſome to the new converts, honeſt miniſters are not mercenary.

After ſome ſtay in Corinth, the apoſtle was joined by Silas and Timothy, and diſputed frequently in the Synagogue, reaſoning and proving, that Jeſus was the true Meſſiah. This exaſperated the Jews to the greateſt degree, and what they could not conquer by argument and force of reaſon, they endeavoured to carry by noiſe and clamour, blended with blaſphemies and revilings; the laſt refuge of an impotent and baffled cauſe. But St. Paul, to teſtify his reſentment, ſhook his garments, and told them, that ſince they were determined to pull down the vengeance of heaven upon their own heads, he was abſolutely guiltleſs and innocent, and would henceforth addreſs himſelf to the Gentiles. Accordingly he left them, and repaired to the houſe of Juſtus, a religious proſelyte, where, by his preaching and miracles, he converted great numbers to the faith; among whom were Criſpus, the chief ruler of the ſynagogue, and Garus and Stephanus, who with their families were baptiſed, and admitted members of the chriſtian church.

But, leſt the ungrateful, yea cruel behaviour of unbelievers, ſhould diſcourage this able miniſter from proſecuting the glorious work of the converſion of ſinners; our dear Redeemer appeared to him in a viſion, and told him, that notwithſtanding the bad ſucceſs he had hitherto met with, there was a large harveſt to be gathered in that place: that he ſhould not be afraid of his enemies, but preach the Goſpel boldly and ſecurely, for that he himſelf would protect and preſerve him.

About this time he ſeems to have wrote his firſt epiſtle to the Theſſalonians, Silas and Timothy being lately returned from thence, and delivered the meſſage for which he had ſent them thither. The chief deſign of this epiſtle is to confirm them in the belief of the chriſtian religion, and excite them to perſevere in it, notwithſtanding all the malice of their enemies, and the perſecutions they muſt expect to ſuffer, and

to inſtruct them in the duties of a religious life,

During the apoſtle's ſtay at Corinth, he wrote his ſecond epiſtle to the Theſſalonians, to ſupply his abſence. In this epiſtle he again endeavours to confirm their minds in the truth of the goſpel, and prevent their being ſhaken with thoſe troubles, which the wicked and unbelieving Jews would be continually raiſing againſt them. And becauſe ſome paſſages in his former epiſtle relating to the deſtruction of the Jews had been miſunderſtood, as if the day of the Lord was near at hand, he rectifies theſe miſtakes, and ſhews the ſigns that muſt precede our Lord's coming to judgment.

St. Paul, on his leaving the church at Corinth, took ſhip at Cenchrea, the port of Corinth, for Syria, taking with him Equila and Parcilla; and on his arrival at Epheſus, he preached a while in the ſynagogue of the Jews, promiſing to return to them, after keeping the paſſover at Jeruſalem. Accordingly he again took ſhip, and landed at Cæſarea, and from thence travelled to Jeruſalem, where he kept the feaſt, viſited the church, and then repaired to Antioch. Here he ſtayed ſome time, and then traverſed the countries of Galatia and Phrygia, confirming the new converted chriſtians, till he came to Epheſus.

During the time he ſpent in this large circuit, Providence took care of the churches of Epheſus and Corinth by means of one Apollos, an eloquent Jew of Alexandria, and well acquainted with the law and writings of the prophets. This man coming to Epheſus, though he was only inſtructed in the rudiments of Chriſtianity, and John's Baptiſm, yet he taught with great courage, and a moſt powerful zeal. After being fully inſtructed in the faith, by Aquila and Priſcilla, he paſſed over into Acaia, being furniſhed with recommendatory letters, by the churches of Epheſus and Corinth. He was of the greateſt ſervice in Acaia, in watering what Paul had planted, confirming the diſciples, and powerfully convincing the Jews that Jeſus was the true Meſſiah, promiſed in the ſcriptures.

While Apollos was thus employed, St. Paul returned to Epheſus, where he fixed his abode for three years, bringing with him Gaius of Derbe, Ariſtarchus a native of Theſſalonica, Timotheus and Eraſtus of Corinth, and Titus. The firſt thing

thing he did, after his arrival, was to examine certain diſciples, "Whether they had received the Holy Ghoſt ſince they believed?" To which they anſwered, "That the doctrine they had received promiſed nothing of that nature, nor had they ever heard that ſuch an extraordinary ſpirit had of late been beſtowed upon the church."

This anſwer ſurpriſed the apoſtle, who aſked them in what name they had been baptized? ſince, in the chriſtian form, the name of the Holy Ghoſt was always expreſſed. They replied, that they had only received John's baptiſm; upon which the apoſtle informed them, that though John's baptiſm commanded nothing but repentance, yet it tacitly implied the whole doctrine of Chriſt and the Holy Ghoſt. When they heard this, they were baptized according to the form preſcribed by Chriſt himſelf, that is, in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt, and after the apoſtle had prayed and laid his hands over them, they received the gift of tongues, and other miraculous powers then common in the church.

After this, he entered into the Jewiſh ſynagogues, where, for the firſt three months, he contended and diſputed with the Jews, endeavouring, with great earneſtneſs and reſolution, to convince them of the truth of the Chriſtian religion. But when inſtead of ſucceſs, he met with nothing but obſtinacy and infidelity, he left the ſynagogue, and taking thoſe with him whom he had converted, inſtructed them and others who reſorted to him, in the ſchool of one Tyrannus, a place where ſcholars uſed to be inſtructed. In this manner he continued to preach the goſpel two whole years; by which means the Jews and proſelytes had an opportunity of hearing the glad tidings of ſalvation: and becauſe miracles are the cleareſt evidence of a divine commiſſion, the Almighty was pleaſed to rectify the doctrine which St. Paul delivered by amazing and miraculous operations, many of which were of a peculiar and extraordinary nature; for he not only healed thoſe that came to him, but if napkins or handkerchiefs were only touched by him, and applied to the ſick, their diſeaſes immediately vaniſhed, and the evil ſpirit departed out of them that were poſſeſſed by them.

About this time the apoſtle wrote his Epiſtle to the Galatians; for he had heard that, ſince his departure, corrupt

corrupt opinions had crept in among them, with regard to the neceſſity of obſerving the legal rites: and that ſeveral impoſtors had found admittance into that church, who knew no better method of undermining the doctrine he had planted there, than by villifying his perſon, ſlighting him as an apoſtle only at ſecond hand, not to be compared with Peter, James, and John, who had familiarly converſed with Chriſt in the days of his fleſh, and been immediately deputed by him. In this Epiſtle, therefore, he reproves them with ſome neceſſary ſeverity, for their being ſo ſoon led out of the right way wherein he had placed them, and ſo eaſily ſuffered themſelves to be impoſed upon by the crafty artifices of ſeducers. He vindicates the honour of his apoſtleſhip, and the immediate receiving his commiſſion from Chriſt, wherein he ſhews that he was not inferior to the very beſt of the apoſtles. He largely refutes thoſe Judaical opinions that had tainted and infected them; and the concluſion inſtructs them in the rules and duties of a holy life.

During St. Paul's ſtay at Epheſus, an accident happened which was attended with great trouble and danger. In this city was the celebrated temple of Diana, a ſtructure ſo magnificent for beauty, riches, and magnitude, that it was reckoned one of the ſeven wonders of the world. But what increaſed its fame and reputation was an image of Diana kept there, which the idolatrous prieſts perſuaded the people was made by Jupiter himſelf, and dropt down from heaven; for which reaſon it was held in great veneration, not only at Epheſus, but throughout all Aſia. So that people procured ſilver ſhrines or figures of this temple of ſuch a ſize as to carry in their pockets, either for curioſity, or to ſtir up their devotion. This proved the ſource of a great deal of buſineſs to the ſilverſmiths of Epheſus; of whom one Demetrius was the chief. This man plainly perceiving that Chriſtianity tended to the ſubverſion of Idolatry, and conſequently to the ruin of their gainful employment, called all the artiſts together, and pathetically repreſented to them how inevitably they muſt be reduced to a ſtate of poverty, if they ſuffered Paul to bring their temple and goddeſs into contempt, by perſuading people, as he did, that they were no gods that were made by hands.

This ſpeech of Demetrus fired them

them with a zeal which they could no longer contain; ſo that they cried out with one voice "Great is Diana of the Epheſians." They ſhould indeed have conſidered that if their goddeſs was able to defend herſelf againſt the doctrines preached by Paul, neither ſhe nor the temple were in any danger: whereas if Paul was able to deſtroy their gods, it was in vain for them to reſiſt him. But intereſt and ſuperſtition meeting in the minds of a bigotted multitude, admitted of no reaſon. They were all fired with a zeal for their goddeſs, and determined, if they could find Paul, to expoſe him to the beaſts in the theatre, for it was cuſtomary in thoſe days, at the celebration of their public games and feſtivals, to expoſe ſlaves to the ravage of wild beaſts for the diverſion of the ſpectators. The whole city was filled with the tumult; and the crowd miſſing Paul, laid hold on Gaius and Ariſtarchus, two Macedonians of Paul's company, and hurried them into the theatre, with a deſign to throw them to the wild beaſts. Paul, who was at preſent in a place of ſecurity, hearing of the danger to which his brethren were expoſed, was very deſirous of venturing after them, in order to ſpeak in their behalf; but he was at laſt diſſuaded from it, not only by Chriſtians, but alſo by the Gentile governors of the theatrical games, who were his friends, and who aſſured him that he would only endanger himſelf without reſcuing his friends.

The noiſe and confuſion of the multitude was now prodigious, moſt of them not knowing the reaſon for which they were come together, and therefore ſome ſaid one thing, and ſome another. In this diſtraction, Alexander, a Jewiſh convert, was ſingled out by the multitude, and, by the inſtigation of the Jews, was going to make his defence, in which, doubtleſs, he would have laid the whole blame upon Paul: but the multitude perceiving him to be a Jew, and therefore ſuſpecting him to be one of Paul's aſſociates, raiſed another outcry for near two hours together, wherein nothing could be heard, but "Great is Diana of the Epheſians." This confuſion brought the town-clerk, who kept the regiſter of the games, into the theatre, to ſuppreſs, if poſſible, ſo uncommon a tumult. And having, with great difficulty, obtained ſilence, he calmly and diſcreetly told them, "That the world was ſufficiently acquainted with the devotion paid by the Epheſians

ſians to the great goddeſs Diana, and the image which fell down from Jupiter; and therefore it was abſolutely needleſs for them to publiſh it at that time. That if Demetrius and his fraternity had any thing to alledge againſt Paul and his companions, the courts were open, and they might bring their accuſation againſt them. Or, if they were queſtioned with regard to the breach of any of their laws, the cauſe ought to be heard in a regular aſſembly. That they would do well to conſider this, and be quiet; having already rendered themſelves obnoxious to the diſpleaſure of the magiſtrates, if they ſhould think proper to call them to an account for that day's tumult."

This diſcourſe had the deſired effect; the multitude were convinced that they had acted very improperly, and therefore repaired to their reſpective habitations; and Gaius, Ariſtarchus, and Alexander were releaſed without any hurt. But the eſcape of Paul was ſo remarkable, that he mentions it as a miraculous deliverance. "We had (ſays he) the ſentence of death in ourſelves, that we ſhould not truſt in ourſelves, but in God, who raiſed the dead, who delivered us from ſo great a death. And in another place he tells us, he fought with beaſts at Epheſus; alluding either to the deſign of the enraged multitude, of throwing him to the wild beaſts, in the theatre, though their intention was not executed, or to the manners of the people, who ſufficiently deſerved the character of being ſavage and brutal in the higheſt degree.

About this time Paul was informed of ſome diſturbances in the church at Corinth, hatched and fomented by a company of falſe teachers, crept in among them, who endeavoured to draw them into parties and factions, by perſuading one company to be for Peter, another for Paul, and a third for Apollos: as if the principal part of religion conſiſted in being of this or that denomination, or in a warm active zeal to depreciate and oppoſe whoever was not of the ſame ſect.

It is a very weak and ſlender claim, when a man holds his religion by no better title than his having joined himſelf to ſuch or ſuch a ſect or congregation, and is remarkably zealous to promote it, to be childiſhly and paſſionately clamorous for ſome perſon's particular mode of adminiſtration, or ſome particular opinion; as if religion rather

rather conſiſted in diſputes, or in ſeparating from our brethren, than "in righteouſneſs, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghoſt."

By theſe means, ſchiſms and factions broke into the Corinthian church; whereby many wild and extravagant opinions, ſome of them ſuch as tended to undermine the fundamental articles of Chriſtianity, were planted and had taken root. To cure theſe diſtempers, St. Paul wrote his firſt epiſtle to the Corinthians; wherein he ſmartly reproves them for their ſchiſms and parties, conjures them to peace and unity, corrects thoſe groſs corruptions that had been introduced among them, and particularly reſolves thoſe many caſes and controverſies wherein they had requeſted his advice and council. Soon after Apollos, determining to go to Crete together with Zenos, St. Paul ſent by them his epiſtle to Titus, whom he had made biſhop of that iſland, and had left there for propagating the goſpel. In this epiſtle he inſtructs him fully in the execution of his office, both with regard to himſelf and others.

CHAP. V.

Tranſactions of S. Paul, during the farther Progreſs of his Miniſtry, to the Time of his Arraignment, before Felix.

SOON after the tumult at Athens, Paul called the Chriſtians together, and took his leave of them with the utmoſt tender expreſſions of love and affection. He had now ſpent almoſt three years at Epheſus, and founded there a very conſiderable church, of which he had ordained Timothy the firſt biſhop. He firſt travelled about two hundred miles northward, to Troas, before he took ſhip, expecting to meet Titus there. But miſſing him, he proceeded on his voyage to Macedonia.

On his arrival there, he preached the Goſpel, in ſeveral places, even as far as Illyricum, now called Sclavonia. During this journey he met with many troubles and dangers, "without were fightings, and within fears;" but God, who comforteth thoſe that are caſt down, revived his ſpirits, by the arrival of Titus, who gave him a pleaſing account of the good effects his epiſtle had produced at Corinth. This worthy biſhop came thither with large contributions from the church at Corinth; and from the example of thoſe liberal chriſtians, St. Paul ſtirred up the Macedonians to imitate their charity, intending to aſſiſt the poor chriſtians at Jeruſalem.

During

During the ſtay of Titus in Macedonia, Paul wrote his ſecond epiſtle to the Corinthians, and ſent it to them by Titus and Luke. In this epiſtle he endeavours to rectify what his former epiſtle had not effected, to vindicate his apoſtleſhip from that contempt and ſcorn, and himſelf from thoſe ſlanders and aſperſions, which the ſeducers, who found themſelves laſhed by his former letter, had caſt upon him; together with ſeveral other particular caſes relative to the church.

About this time alſo he wrote his firſt epiſtle to Timothy, whom he had left at Epheſus, wherein he gives him directions how to conduct himſelf in the diſcharge of that great office and authority in the church, committed to his care: and inſtructs him in the particular qualifications of thoſe he ſhould make choice of as biſhops and miniſters in the church. He likewiſe gives him inſtructions with regard to his giving orders to deaconeſſes, and inſtructing ſervants; warning him at the ſame time againſt that peſtilent generation of heretics and ſeducers that would ariſe in the church.

During his ſtay in Greece, he went to Corinth, where he wrote his famous epiſtle to the Romans, which he ſent by Phœbe, a deaconeſs of the church of Cenchea, near Corinth. His principal intention in this epiſtle is, fully to ſtate and determine the great controverſy between the Jews and Gentiles, with regard to the obligations of the rights and ceremonies of the Jewiſh law, and thoſe principal and material points of doctrine depending upon it, namely, chriſtian liberty, the uſe of indifferent things, and the like. And, which is the chief intention of all religion, inſtructs them, and preſſes them to perform the duties of a holy and pious life, ſuch as the chriſtian doctrine naturally recommends.

St. Paul being now determined to return into Syria, in order to convey the contributions to the brethren at Jeruſalem, ſet out on his journey; but being informed that the Jews had formed a deſign of killing and robbing him by the way, he returned to Macedonia, and Philippi, from whence he went to Troas, where he ſtayed ſeven days. Here he preached to them on the Lord's day, and continued his diſcourſe till midnight, being himſelf to depart in the morning. The length of his diſcourſe, and time of the night, cauſed ſome of his audience to be overtaken with ſleep,

ſleep, and among them a young man, named Eutychus, who fell from the third ſtory, and was taken up dead; but the apoſtle, by his prayers to the throne of grace, preſently reſtored him to life and health.

How indefatigable was the induſtry of this great apoſtle! how cloſely did he tread in the ſteps of his great maſter, who "went about doing good." He preached, and wrought miracles, wherever he came. As a maſter builder, he either laid the foundation, or raiſed the ſuperſtructure. He was "inſtant, in reaſon and out of reaſon," and ſpared no pains to aſſiſt the ſouls of men.

The night being thus ſpent in holy exerciſes, St. Paul took his leave of the brethren, in the morning, travailing on foot to Aſſos, a ſea-port town, whither he had before ſent his companions by ſea. From thence they ſailed to Mytilene, a city in the iſle of Leſbos. The next day they ſailed from thence, and came over-againſt Chios, and the day following landed at Trogyllium, a promontory of Ionia, near Samos. The next day they came to Miletus, not putting in at Epheſus, becauſe the apoſtle was reſolved, if poſſible to be at Jeruſalem the day of Pentecoſt.

On his arrival at Miletus, he ſent to Epheſus, to ſummon the elders of the church, and on their coming, reminded them of the manner in which he had converſed among them; how faithfully and affectionately he had diſcharged the offices of his miniſtry, and how inceſſantly he had laboured for the good of the ſouls of men: adding, that he had never failed to acquaint them, both in public and private, with whatever might be uſeful and profitable to them; urging both the Jews and Gentiles to repentance, and reformation of life, and a hearty entertainment of the faith of Chriſt: that he was now going up to Jeruſalem, where he was ignorant of what might befal him, except what had been foretold him by thoſe who were endued with the prophetical gifts of the Holy Ghoſt; namely, that afflictions and impriſonment would attend him. But that this gave him no concern, being willing to lay down his life, whenever the goſpel required it, and fully determined to ſerve faithfully his great Lord and Maſter. "I well know, ſaid he, that you will ſee my face no more; but for my encouragement and ſatisfaction, ye yourſelves can bear me witneſs, that I have not, by conceal-

ing any part of the chriſtian doctrine, betrayed your ſouls. And as for yourſelves, whom God hath made biſhops and paſtors of his church, you ſhould be careful to feed, guide, and direct thoſe chriſtians under your inſpection, and be infinitely tender of the welfare of ſouls, for whoſe redemption the bleſſed Jeſus laid down his own life. All the care, therefore, poſſible for you to uſe is no more than neceſſary; for after my departure, heretical teachers will appear in the church, to the great danger of the ſouls of men, ſeeking by every crafty method, and pernicious doctrine, to gain proſelytes to their party, and by that means fill the church of Chriſt with ſchiſms and factions. Watch ye, therefore, and remember with what tears and ſorrow I have, during three years, warned you of theſe things. And now I recommend you to the divine favour and protection, and to the rules and inſtructions of the goſpel, which, if adhered to, will undoubtedly diſpoſe and perfect you for that ſtate of happineſs, which the Almighty hath prepared for good men, in the manſions of eternity. You well know, that I have, from the beginning, dealt faithfully and uprightly with you; that I have had no covetous deſigns, or ever deſired the riches of other men; nay, I have laboured with mine own hands, to ſupport myſelf and my companions: you ought therefore to ſupport the weak, and relieve the poor, rather than be yourſelves chargeable to others, according to that incomparable ſaying of the great Redeemer of mankind, "It is more bleſſed to give, than to receive." If we minutely attend to the whole of this apoſtle's preaching and writing, we ſhall find that he ever ſtrenuouſly inculcates not only points of faith, but alſo practical duties, without which our faith is vain.

St. Paul having finiſhed his diſcourſe, he kneeled down and joined with them in prayer; when they all melted into tears, and, with the greateſt expreſſions of ſorrow, attended him to the ſhip; grieving in the moſt paſſionate manner for what he had told them, "That they ſhould ſee his face no more."

Paul, with his companions, now departed from Myletos, and arrived at Coos, from whence they ſailed the next day to Rhodes, two iſlands in the Ægean ſea. Leaving this place they came to Patara, the metropolis of Lycia, where they went on board another veſſel bound for Tyre,

Tyre, in Phœnicia. On his arrival, he viſited the brethren there, and continued with them a week, and was adviſed by ſome of them, who had the gift of prophecy, not to go up to Jeruſalem. But the apoſtle would by no means abandon his deſign, or refuſe to ſuffer any thing, provided he might ſpread the goſpel of his Saviour. Finding all perſuaſions were in vain, they jointly accompanied him to the ſhore, where he kneeled down and prayed with them; and after embracing them with the utmoſt affection, he went on board, and came to Ptolemais, and the next day to Ceſarea.

During their ſtay in this place, Agabus, a chriſtian prophet, came thither from Judea, who taking Paul's girdle, bound his own hands and feet with it; ſignifying by this ſymbol, that the Jews would bind Paul in that manner, and deliver him over to the Gentiles. Whereupon, both his own companions and the chriſtians of Ceſarea, earneſtly beſought him that he would not go up to Jeruſalem. But the apoſtle aſked them, if they intended by theſe paſſionate diſſuaſives to add more affliction to his ſorrow? "For I am ready, continued he, not only to be bound, but alſo to die at Jeruſalem, for the name of the Lord Jeſus."

When the diſciples found that his reſolution was not to be ſhaken, they importuned him no farther, leaving the event to be determined according to the pleaſure of the Moſt High. And all things being ready, Paul and his companions ſet forwards on their journey, and were kindly and joyfully received by the chriſtians, on their arrival at Jeruſalem.

The day after their arrival, Paul and his companions went to the houſe of St. James the apoſtle, where the reſt of the biſhops and governors of the church were met together. After mutual ſalutations, the apoſtle gave them a particular account of the ſucceſs with which God had bleſſed his endeavours in propagating Chriſtianity among the Gentiles; for which they all joined in thankſgiving to God, but withal told him, that he was now come to a place, where there were many thouſands of Jewiſh converts, who were all zealous for the law of Moſes, and who had been informed, that he taught the Jews whom he had converted, to renounce circumciſion, and the ceremonies of the law. That as ſoon as the multitude heard of his arrival, they would all aſſemble to ſee how he behaved himſelf in this matter:

matter: and therefore, to prevent a diſturbance, they thought it adviſeable for him to join himſelf with four perſons, who were at that time to accompliſh a vow, and perform the uſual rites and ceremonies with them, and provide ſuch ſacrifices for them, as the law, in that caſe, required. St. Paul, who in ſuch caſes was willing "to become all things to all men, that he might gain the more," conſented to their counſel; and taking the perſons with him to the temple, told the prieſts that the time of a vow they had made being now expired, and having purified themſelves, according as the nature of their caſe required, they were come to make the offerings required by law.

The ſeven days in which thoſe ſacrifices were to be offered being now almoſt ended, certain Jews from Aſia, finding him in the temple, began to raiſe a tumult, and laying hold of Paul, called to their brethren the Jews to aſſiſt them, declaring that this was the perſon, who every where preached doctrines derogatory to the Jewiſh nation, and deſtructive to the inſtitutions of the law. This accuſation, though abſolutely falſe, ſet the whole city in an uproar, and ſeizing on the apoſtle, they dragged him out of the temple, when the doors were immediately ſhut, to prevent his returning into the holy place.

As they were proceeding in this manner, Paul aſked the governor, whether he might have the liberty of ſpeaking to him, who finding he underſtood the Greek language, enquired of him whether he was not that Egyptian, who, a few years before, had raiſed a ſedition in Judea, and headed a party of four thouſand vile and profligate wretches. To which the apoſtle replied, that he was a Jew of Tarſus, a free man of a rich and honourable city; and therefore begged of him, that he might have leave to ſpeak to the people. This being readily granted, Paul addreſſed them in the Hebrew language as follows:

"Liſten, ye deſcendants of Jacob, to a perſon of your own religion, and like yourſelves a child of Abraham; born in Tarſus, and brought up in this city, at the feet of Gamaliel, and fully inſtructed in the law delivered by Moſes to our forefathers, and formerly as zealous for the temple-worſhip, as ye are at preſent."

"Nay, I perſecuted unto death all who believed in Jeſus, ſeizing on all

all I could find, both men and women, and caſting them into priſon.

"But as I was purſuing my journey, to execute this commiſſion, and was arrived near Damaſcus, there appeared, about mid-day, a light from heaven, ſhining round about me."

"Terrified at ſo awful an appearance, I fell to the ground, and heard a voice, ſaying unto me, "Saul, Saul, why perſecuteſt thou me?" To which I anſwered, "Who art thou, Lord?" And the voice replied, "I am Jeſus of Nazareth, whom thou perſecuteſt."

"After recovering from the terror with which my mind was filled, I anſwered, "What ſhall I do, Lord?" And he replied, "Ariſe, and go into Damaſcus, and there it ſhall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do."

"The brilliancy of the glory deprived me of ſight; ſo that my companions led me by the hand to Damaſcus, where one Ananias, a perſon well reſpected by all the Jews of that city, viſited me, and ſaid, "Brother Saul, receive thy ſight." And in a moment my eyes were opened, and I ſaw him ſtanding before me.

"When he ſaw that my ſight was reſtored, he ſaid to me, The Almighty God of Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, hath appointed thee to know his will, to ſee the great Meſſiah, the Holy One of God, and hear the voice of his mouth; for thou art choſen to be a witneſs to all the nations of the earth of thoſe ſurpriſing things thou haſt ſeen and heard. Why, therefore, tarrieſt thou here any longer? "Ariſe and be baptized, and waſh away thy ſins, calling on the name of the Lord."

"After this glorious viſion, and miraculous power of the Moſt High, when I was returned from Damaſcus to Jeruſalem, and offering up my prayers in the temple, I fell into a trance, and again ſaw the great Son of David, who ſaid unto me, Depart quickly from Jeruſalem; for the ſons of Jacob will refuſe to believe thy teſtimony concerning me. And I anſwered, Lord, they know how cruelly I uſed thy ſaints and followers; that I impriſoned, and beat them, in every city, and in every ſynagogue. Nay, when they ſhed the blood of thy holy martyr Stephen, I was alſo one of the ſpectators; I conſented to his death; I even kept the raiment of thoſe that ſlew him."

But he replied, "Depart, I will ſend thee to countries far remote; even to the Gentiles."

The Jews had, till now, liſtened with ſome attention to his ſpeech; but on his mentioning the commiſſion he had received to preach the Goſpel to the Gentiles, their fury knew no bounds; crying out, with one voice, "Away with ſuch a fellow from the earth."

But the captain of the guard commanded him to be brought within the caſtle, and that he ſhould be examined by ſcourging, till he confeſſed the reaſon of the uncommon rage ſhewn againſt him by the people. Accordingly the lictor bound him, and was going to put the orders he had received into execution, when Paul aſked the centurion that ſtood by, whether it was lawful to ſcourge a citizen of Rome, before any ſentence had been paſſed upon him? The centurion, inſtead of anſwering the queſtion, repaired immediately to the governor, and deſired him to take care how he proceeded againſt the priſoner, becauſe he was a Roman. On this information the governor came into the priſon, and aſked Paul, whether he was really a free citizen of Rome? and being told he was, he anſwered, that he himſelf procured that great privilege by a large ſum of money: but Paul anſwered, I was free born. On receiving this account, the governor commanded the centurion not to ſcourge him, being terrified at what he had already done, namely, his chaining a free denizen of Rome.

The next day he ordered his chains to be taken off; and that he might thoroughly ſatisfy himſelf of the cauſe of ſo unuſual a tumult the preceding day, ſummoned the Sanhedrim to meet, and brought down Paul before them.

The apoſtle being thus placed before the great council of the Jews, told them, that in all the paſſages of his life he had taken care to govern his actions by the ſevereſt rules of duty and conſcience. "Men and brethren, ſaid he, I have lived in all good conſcience before God, until this day."

But however this expreſſion of St. Paul might tend to ſhew the true ſtate of his mind, the high-prieſt Ananias was ſo offended at it, that he commanded thoſe who ſtood next to him to ſtrike him in the face; at which the apoſtle ſmartly replied, "God ſhall ſmite thee, thou whited wall." On which ſome of the ſpectators replied, "It is not lawful to revile the high-prieſt of the Almighty." Paul anſwered, "I did not know

know that Ananias was appointed by God to be an high-prieſt: but as he is inveſted with authority, it is unjuſt to revile him, God himſelf having commanded that "no man ſhould ſpeak evil of the rulers of the people." Paul, perceiving that the council conſiſted partly of Sadducees, and partly of Phariſees, cried aloud, "Men and brethren, I am a Phariſee, the ſon of a Phariſee, and am now brought before this tribunal, for aſſerting the reſurrection from the dead."

This declaration threw the whole court into confuſion, by exciting the regard of the Phariſees, who favoured the doctrine of the reſurrection, and incurring the reſentment of the Sadducees, who ſtrenuouſly oppoſed it.

The diſſentions of theſe ſects increaſed to that degree, that the captain feared Paul would have been pulled in pieces; and therefore took him from the bar, and carried him back to the caſtle. But, during the ſilence of the night, he was comforted by extraordinary communications of the divine ſpirit, encouraging him to conſtancy and reſolution, and aſſuring him, that he ſhould, notwithſtanding all the malice and wicked deſigns of his enemies, live to bear his teſtimony, even at Rome itſelf.

The next morning the Jews, whoſe envy and malice were increaſed by theſe dilatory proceedings, determined to uſe a quicker method of putting a period to his life. In order to this, above forty of the moſt turbulent entered into a ſhocking confederacy of killing him; ratifying it by an oath, and the moſt bitter execration, that they would neither eat nor drink till they had put their inhuman deſign in execution. Accordingly this deſign, tho' probably concluded under the mantle of the night, was diſcovered to St. Paul by his ſiſter's ſon, and at the requeſt of the apoſtle told to the governor himſelf, who immediately commanded two parties of horſe and foot to be ready by nine o'clock that night, in order to conduct St. Paul to Felix, the Roman governor of that province; to whom alſo he ſent an account of the whole proceedings of the Jews againſt the priſoner, and at the ſame time ordered his accuſers alſo to appeal before the Roman magiſtrate. Accordingly St. Paul was conducted to Antipatris, and afterwards to Ceſarea, where the letters being delivered to Felix, the apoſtle was alſo preſented to him;

and

and finding that he belonged to the province of Cilicia, he told him that as ſoon as his accuſers were come down, he would determine the affair, and in the mean time commanded him to be ſecured in the place called Herod's Hall.

CHAP. VI.

The Tranſactions of St. Paul, from his firſt Trial before Felix, till his coming to Rome.

OUR apoſtle, ſoon after his arrival, encountered Tertullus, who in a ſhort, but eloquent ſpeech, began to accuſe him, charging him with ſedition, hereſy, and the profanation of the temple.

The orator having finiſhed his charge againſt the apoſtle, Felix, told St. Paul that he was now at liberty to make his defence, which he did, in the following manner:

"I anſwer this charge of the Jews with the greater ſatisfaction before thee, becauſe thou haſt for many years been a judge of this nation. About twelve days ſince, I repaired to Jeruſalem, to worſhip the God of Jacob. But I neither diſputed with any man, or endeavoured to ſtir the people in the ſynagogues or the city. Nor can they prove the charge they have brought againſt me.

This, however, I readily confeſs, that after the way which they call hereſy, ſo worſhip I the God of my Fathers, and according to this faith, I am careful to maintain a clear and quiet conſcience both toward God and man.

"After I had ſpent ſome years in diſtant countries, I repaired to Jeruſalem, with the alms I had collected in other provinces, for the poor of mine own nation, and offerings to the God of Jacob. And while I was performing the duties of religion, certain Aſiatic Jews found me in the temple, purified according to the law; but neither attended with a multitude of followers, or the leaſt tumultuous aſſembly. It was therefore neceſſary that theſe Jews ſhould have been here, if they had any thing to alledge againſt me. Nay, I appeal to thoſe of the Sanhedrim here preſent, if any thing has been laid to my charge, except the objections of the Sadducees, who violently oppoſed me for aſſerting the doctrine of the reſurrection."

Felix having thus heard both parties, refuſed to paſs any final ſentence, till he had more fully adviſed about it, and conſulted Lyſias, the governor of the caſtle, who was the moſt proper perſon to give an account of the ſedition and tumult; commanding,

ing, in the mean time, that St. Paul ſhould be kept under a guard, but at the ſame time enjoy the liberty of being viſited by his friends, and receiving from them any office of friendſhip.

Soon after this, Felix's wife Druſilla, a Jeweſs, and daughter of the elder Herod came down to him at Ceſarea, in whoſe preſence the governor ſent for Paul, and gave him leave to explain the doctrines of Chriſtianity. In this diſcourſe the apoſtle took occaſion to inſiſt upon the moſt important points, both of faith and practice, particularly the influence which a future judgment ſhould have upon the whole tenor of his life and conduct.

This diſcourſe was wiſely adapted to the ſtate and temper of Felix: though when St. Paul pathetically deſcribed the terrors of the laſt judgment, Felix trembled on his throne, and was ſo greatly affected, that he cauſed the apoſtle to break off abruptly, telling him that he would hear the remainder of his diſcourſe at a more convenient ſeaſon.

Felix, no doubt, had ſufficient reaſon to tremble, and his conſcience to be ſenſibly alarmed at theſe reflections; for he was a man notoriouſly infamous for rapine and violence. Tacitus tells us, that he made his will the law of his government, practiſing all manner of cruelty and injuſtice. To theſe qualities he added bribery and covetouſneſs; and therefore often ſent for our apoſtle to diſcourſe with him, expecting he would have given him a conſiderable ſum for his releaſe; having, in all probability, heard that St. Paul had brought a large quantity of money to Jeruſalem.

But finding no offers were made him, either by the apoſtle himſelf, or his friends, he kept him priſoner two years; when he himſelf being diſcharged from his office by Nero, he left Paul in priſon, in order to gratify the malice of the Jews, and engage them to ſpeak the better of his government, after his departure from Judea.

Felix was ſucceeded in the government of the province, by Portius Feſtus, before whom at his firſt coming to Jeruſalem, the high-prieſt and Sanhedrim preferred an indictment againſt Paul, deſiring that he might be ſent for up to Jeruſalem, in order to take his trial, intending to aſſaſſinate him by the way. But Feſtus told them, that he was ſhortly going himſelf to Ceſarea; and that if they had any complaint againſt

Paul, they ſhould come down thither, and accuſe him.

Accordingly, as ſoon as he was come to Ceſarea, he aſcended the tribunal, where the Jews renewed the charge they had before brought againſt Paul; but the apoſtle ſoon cleared himſelf of every part of the charge, they not being able to prove any thing againſt him. Feſtus, however, being willing to procure the favour of the Jews at his entrance on the government, aſked Paul whether he would go up and be tried before him at Jeruſalem? But the apoſtle, well knowing the conſequences of ſuch a propoſal, anſwered, as a Roman, "I appeal unto Cæſar."

This method of appealing was common among the Romans, and introduced to defend and ſecure the lives and fortunes of the people from the unjuſt encroachments, and rigorous ſeverities of the magiſtrates, whereby it was lawful, in caſes of oppreſſion, to appeal to the people for redreſs; a thing more than once ſettled by the ſanction of the Valerian law.

Some time after St. Paul had appealed unto Cæſar, king Agrippa, who ſucceeded Herod in the Tetrarchate of Galilee, and his ſiſter Bernice, came to Cæſarea to viſit the new governor. Feſtus embraced this opportunity of mentioning the caſe of our apoſtle to king Agrippa, together with the remarkable tumult this affair had occaſioned among the Jews, and the appeal he had made to Cæſar. This account excited the curioſity of king Agrippa; and he was deſirous of hearing himſelf what St. Paul had to ſay in his own vindication.

Accordingly, the next day the king and his ſiſter, accompanied with Feſtus the governor, and ſeveral other perſons of diſtinction, came into the court with a pompous and ſplendid retinue, where the priſoner was brought before them. On his appearing, Feſtus informed the court, how greatly he had been importuned by the Jews, both at Cæſarea and Jeruſalem, to put the priſoner to death as a malefactor; but having on examination found him guilty of no capital crime, and the priſoner himſelf having appealed unto Cæſar, he was determined to ſend him to Rome; but was willing to have his cauſe debated before Agrippa, that he might be furniſhed with ſome material particulars to ſend with him; it being highly abſurd to ſend a priſoner without ſignifying the crimes alledged againſt him.

Feſtus

Feſtus having finiſhed his ſpeech, Agrippa told Paul, he was now at liberty to make his own defence: and ſilence being made, he delivered himſelf in the following manner, addreſſing his ſpeech particularly to Agrippa.

"I conſider it as a peculiar happineſs, king Agrippa, that I am to make my defence againſt the accuſations of the Jews, before thee; becauſe thou art well acquainted with all their cuſtoms, and the queſtions commonly debated among them: I therefore beſeech thee to hear me patiently. All the Jews are well acquainted with my manner of life, from my youth, the greateſt part of it having been ſpent with mine own countrymen at Jeruſalem. They alſo know that I was educated under the inſtitutions of the Phariſees, the ſtricteſt ſect of our religion, and am now arraigned for a tenet believed by all their fathers; a tenet ſufficiently credible in itſelf, and plainly revealed in the ſcriptures, I mean, the reſurrection of the dead. Why ſhould any mortal think it either incredible or impoſſible, that God ſhould raiſe the dead?

"I, indeed, thought myſelf indiſpenſibly obliged to oppoſe the religion of Jeſus of Nazareth. Nor was I ſatisfied with impriſoning and puniſhing with death itſelf, the ſaints I found at Jeruſalem; I even perſecuted them in ſtrange cities, whither my implacable zeal purſued them, having procured authority for that purpoſe from the chief prieſts and elders.

"Accordingly, I departed from Damaſcus, with a commiſſion from the Sanhedrim; but as I was travelling towards that city, I ſaw at mid-day, O king, a light from heaven, far exceeding the brightneſs of the ſun, encompaſſing me and my companions. On ſeeing this awful appearance, we all fell to the earth; and I heard a voice, which ſaid to me, in the Hebrew language, "Saul Saul, why perſecuteſt thou me? It is hard for thee to kick againſt the pricks." To which I anſwered, "Who art thou, Lord?" And he replied "I am Jeſus, whom thou perſecuteſt." But be not terrified, ariſe from the earth: for I have appeared unto thee, that thou mighteſt be both a witneſs of the things thou haſt ſeen, and alſo of others which I will hereafter reveal unto thee.—My power ſhall deliver thee from the Jews and Gentiles, to whom now I ſend thee to preach the Goſpel; to withdraw the veil of darkneſs and ignorance:

ignorance: to turn them from falſhood unto truth, "and from the power of Satan unto God."

"Accordingly, king Agrippa, I readily obeyed the heavenly viſion; I preached the goſpel firſt to the inhabitants of Damaſcus, then to thoſe of Jeruſalem, and Judea, and afterwards to the Gentiles; perſuading them to forſake their iniquities, and, by ſincere repentance, turn to the living God.

Theſe endeavours to ſave the ſouls of ſinful mortals exaſperated the Jews, who caught me in the temple, and entered into a conſpiracy to deſtroy me. But, by the help of Omnipotence, I ſtill remain a witneſs to all the human race, preaching nothing but what Moſes and all the prophets foretold; namely, That the Meſſiah ſhould ſuffer, be the firſt that ſhould riſe from the chambers of the grave, and publiſh the glad tidings of ſalvation, both to the Jews and Gentiles."

While the apoſtle thus pleaded for himſelf, Feſtus cried out, "Paul, thou art mad; too much ſtudy hath deprived thee of thy reaſon." But Paul anſwered. "I am far, moſt noble Feſtus, from being tranſported with idle and diſtracted ideas; the words I ſpeak are dictated by truth and ſobriety: and I am perſuaded that king Agrippa himſelf is not ignorant of theſe things; for they were tranſacted openly in the world. I am confident, king Agrippa, that thou believeſt the prophets; and therefore muſt know that all their predictions were fulfilled in Chriſt." To which Agrippa anſwered, "Thou haſt almoſt perſuaded me to embrace the Chriſtian faith." Paul replied, I ſincerely wiſh, that not only thou, but alſo all that hear me, were not almoſt, but altogether the ſame as I myſelf, except being priſoners."

It being now finally determined that Paul ſhould be ſent to Rome, he was with ſeveral other priſoners of conſequence, committed to the care of Julius, commander of a company belonging to the legion of Auguſtus; and was accompanied in this voyage by St. Luke, Ariſtarchus, Trophimus, and ſome others not mentioned by the ſacred hiſtorian.

In September 56, or according to others, 57, they embarked on board a ſhip of Adramyttium, and ſailed to Sidon, where the centurion courteouſly gave the apoſtle leave to go on ſhore to viſit his friends, and refreſh himſelf. After a ſhort ſtay they ſailed for Cyprus, and arrived oppoſite the Fair-Havens, a place near Myre

Myra a city of Lycia. Here the ſeaſon being far advanced, and Paul foreſeeing it would be a dangerous voyage, perſuaded them to put in and winter there. But the Roman centurion preferring the opinion of the maſter of the ſhip, and the harbour being at the ſame time incommodious, reſolved, if poſſible, to reach Phœnice, a port of Crete, and winter there. But they ſoon found themſelves diſappointed; for the fine ſoutherly gale, which had favoured them for ſome time, ſuddenly changed into a ſtormy and tempeſtuous wind at north-eaſt, which blew with ſuch violence, that the ſhip was obliged to ſail before it; and to prevent her ſinking, they threw over-board the principal part of her lading.

In this deſperate and uncomfortable condition, they continued fourteen days, and on the 14th night the mariners diſcovered they were near ſome coaſt; and therefore, to avoid the rocks, thought proper to come to an anchor, till the morning might give them better information.

During the time they continued at anchor, waiting for the light of the morning, St. Paul prevailed upon them to eat and refreſh themſelves, having faſted a long time, aſſuring them they ſhould all eſcape.

The country near which they were, was, as St. Paul had foretold, an iſland called Melita, now Malta, ſituated in the Libyan ſea, between Syracuſe and Africa. Here they landed, and met with great civility from the people, who treated them with humanity, and entertained them with every neceſſary accommodation. But while St. Paul was laying a few ſticks on the fire, a viper, enlivened by the heat, came from among the wood, and faſtened on his hand. On ſeeing this, the inhabitants of the iſland concluded, that he was certainly ſome notorious murderer, whom the divine vengeance, though it ſuffered him to eſcape the ſea, had reſerved for a more public and ſolemn execution. But when they ſaw him ſhake off the venomous creature into the fire, and no manner of harm enſue, they changed their ſentiments, and cried out, "that he was a God."

After three months ſtay in this iſland, the centurion with his charge went on board the Caſtor and Pollux, a ſhip of Alexandria, bound to Italy. They put in at Syracuſe, where they tarried three days; they then ſailed to Regium, and from thence to Puteoli, where they landed; and finding ſome chriſtians

there, ſtaid, at their requeſt, a week with them, and then ſet forward on their journey to Rome. The chriſtians of this city, hearing of the apoſtle's coming, went to meet him, as far as the Three Taverns, about thirty miles from Rome, and others as far as the Apii-forum, fifty-one miles diſtant from the capital. They kindly embraced each other, and the liberty he ſaw the Chriſtians enjoy at Rome greatly tended to enliven the ſpirits of the apoſtle.

CHAP. VII.

The Tranſactions of St. Paul, from his Arrival at Rome, till his Martyrdom.

HAVING refreſhed himſelf after the fatigue of his voyage, the apoſtle ſent for the heads of the Jewiſh conſiſtory, and related to them the cauſe of his coming, in the following manner: "Though I have been guilty of no violence of the laws of our religion, yet I was delivered by the Jews at Jeruſalem to the Roman governors, who more than once would have acquitted me as innocent of any capital offence; but, by the perverſeneſs of my perſecutors, I was obliged to appeal unto Cæſar; not that I had any thing to accuſe my nation of: I had recourſe to this method merely to clear my own innocence."

Having thus removed a popular prejudice, he added, "That the true cauſe of his ſufferings was what their own religion had taught him, "the belief and expectation of a future reſurrection." But his diſcourſe had different effects on different hearers, ſome being convinced, and others perſiſting in their infidelity.

For two whole years Paul dwelt at Rome, in a houſe he had hired for his own uſe; wherein he conſtantly employed himſelf in preaching and writing for the good of the church.

Among others of the apoſtle's converts at Rome was one Oneſimus, who had formerly been a ſervant to Philemon, a perſon of diſtinction in Coloſſe, but had run away from his Maſter, and taken with him ſome things of value. Having rambled as far as Rome, he was now converted by St. Paul, and by him returned to his Maſter, with a ſhort recommendatory letter, "earneſtly deſiring him to pardon him; and, notwithſtanding his former faults, to treat him kindly, and uſe him as a brother, promiſing withal, that if he had wronged or owed him any thing, he himſelf would repay it."

This epiſtle may be conſidered as a maſter-piece of eloquence, in the perſuaſive way; for the apoſtle has herein

herein had recourſe to all the conſiderations, which friendſhip, religion, piety, and tenderneſs can inſpire, to reconcile an incenſed Maſter to his ſervant.

The Chriſtians of Philippi hearing of St. Paul's impriſonment at Rome, and not knowing what diſtreſs he might be reduced to, raiſed a contribution for him, and ſent it by Ephroditus, their biſhop, by whom he returned an epiſtle to them, wherein he gives ſome account of the ſtate of his affairs at Rome; gratefully acknowledges their kindneſs to him; warns them againſt the dangerous opinions which the Judaizing teachers began to vent among them; and adviſes them to live in continual obedience to Chriſt; to avoid diſputations, delight in prayer, be courageous under affliction, united in love, and cloathed with humility, in imitation of the bleſſed Jeſus, who ſo far humbled himſelf, as to become obedient unto death, even the death of the croſs.

St. Paul had lived three years at Epheſus, preaching the goſpel to the numerous inhabitants of that city, and was therefore well acquainted with the ſtate and condition of the place; ſo that taking the opportunity of Tychicus's going thither, he wrote his epiſtle to the Epheſians, wherein he endeavours to countermine the principles and practices both of the Jews and Gentiles; to confirm them in the belief and practices of the Chriſtian doctrine; and to inſtruct them fully in the great myſteries of the goſpel; their redemption and juſtification by the death of Chriſt; their gratuitous election, their union with the Jews in one body, of which Chriſt is the head, and the glorious exaltation of that head above all creatures both ſpiritual and temporal; together with many excellent precepts, both as to the general duties of religion, and the duties of their particular relations.

St. Paul himſelf had never been at Coloſſe: Epaphras, who was then at Rome, a priſoner with him, had preached the goſpel there with good ſucceſs; and from him he might learn, that certain falſe teachers had endeavoured to perſuade the people, that they ought not to apply to God by Jeſus Chriſt, who, ſince his aſcenſion, was ſo far exalted above them; that angels were now become the proper mediators between God and man; and therefore in oppoſition to this, as well as other ſeductions of the ſame nature, he wrote his epiſtle to the Coloſſians; wherein he magnificently

nificently displays the Messiah, and all the benefits flowing from him, as being the image of his father, the Redeemer of all mankind, the reconciler of all things to God, and the head of the church, which gives life and vigour to all its members.

By what means St. Paul was delivered from his imprisonment, and discharged from the accusation the Jews brought against him, we have no account in history; but it is natural to suppose, that not having sufficient proof of what they alledged, or being informed that the crimes they accused him of were no violations of the Roman law, they durst not implead him before the emperor, and therefore permitted him to be discharged of course. But by whatever means he procured his liberty, he wrote his epistle to the Hebrews before he left Italy, from whence he dates his Salutations.

The principal design of it is to magnify Christ, and the religion of the gospel, above Moses and the Jewish economy, in order to establish and confirm the converted Jews in the firm belief and profession of Christianity, notwithstanding the trouble and persecutions that would certainly attend them.

Having thus discharged his ministry, both by preaching and writing in Italy, St. Paul, accompanied by Timothy, prosecuted his long intended journey into Spain; and, according to the testimony of several writers, crossed the sea, and preached the gospel in Britain.

What success he had in these western parts is not known; he however continued there eight or nine months, and then returned again to the east, visited Sicily, Greece, and Crete, and afterwards repaired into Judea.

Here he met with Peter, and was, together with him, thrown into prison, doubtless in the general persecution raised against the Christians, under pretence that they had set fire to the city. How long he remained in prison is uncertain; nor do we know whether he was scourged before his execution. He was, however, allowed the privilege of a Roman citizen, and therefore beheaded.

When he arrived at the place of execution, which was the Aquæ Salviæ, three miles from Rome, he chearfully, after a solemn preparation, gave his neck to the fatal stroke; and from this vale of misery passed to the blissful regions of immortality, to the kingdom of his beloved Master,

the

the great Redeemer of the human race.

He was buried in the Via Oſtienſis, about two miles from Rome. Conſtantine the Great, at the inſtance of Pope Sylveſter, built a ſtately church over his grave, adorned it with an hundred marble columns, and beautified it with the moſt exquiſite workmanſhip.

St. Paul ſeems, indeed, to have been eminently fitted for the apoſtleſhip of the Gentiles, to contend with and confute the grave and the wiſe, the acute and the ſubtle, the ſage and the learned of the heathen world, and to wound them with arrows from their own quiver. He ſeldom indeed made uſe of learning and philoſophy; it being more agreeable to the deſigns of the goſpel, to confound the wiſdom and learning of the world, by the plain doctrine of the croſs.

He was humble to the loweſt ſtep of debaſement and condeſcenſion, no one ever thinking better of others, or more meanly of himſelf. And though, when he had to deal with envious and malicious adverſaries, who endeavoured, by vilifying his perſon, to obſtruct his miniſtry, he knew how to magnify his office, and to let them know that he was not inferior to the chiefeſt of the apoſtles; yet at other times he always declared to the world, that he conſidered himſelf "the leaſt of the apoſtles, not meet to be called an apoſtle;" and as if this were not enough, he formed a word on purpoſe to expreſs his humility, ſtiling himſelf, "Elachiſtoteran, leſs than the leaſt of the ſaints: nay, the very chief of ſinners."

His repentance and ſobriety were remarkable; for he often abridged himſelf of the conveniency of lawful and neceſſary accommodations.

What he taught to others he practiſed himſelf; his "converſation was in heaven, and his deſires were to depart, and to be with Chriſt," and hence it is very probable, that he always led a ſingle life, though ſome of the ancients rank him among the married apoſtles.

His kindneſs and charity were remarkable; he had a compaſſionate tenderneſs for the poor, and a quick ſenſe of the wants of others. To what church ſoever he came, it was always one of his firſt cares to make proviſion for the poor, and to ſtir up the bounty of the rich and wealthy; nay, he himſelf worked often with his own hands, not only to maintain himſelf, but alſo to help and relieve

them. But his charity to the ſouls of men was infinitely greater, fearing no dangers, refuſing no labours, going through good and evil report, that he might gain men over to the knowledge of the truth, bring them out of the crooked paths, and place them in the ſtrait way that leadeth to life eternal.

Nor was his charity to men greater than his zeal to God, labouring with all his might to promote the honour of his Maſter. When at Athens he ſaw them involved in the groſſeſt ſuperſtition and idolatry, and giving the honour, that was due to God alone, to ſtatues and images. This fired his zeal, and he could not help letting them know the reſentment of his mind, and how greatly they diſhonoured God, the great maker and preſerver of the world. Nor in the courſe of a moſt extenſive miniſtry was he tired with the dangers and difficulties he met with, or the troubles and oppoſitions that were raiſed againſt him.

This will eaſily appear if we take a ſurvey of what trials and ſufferings he underwent; ſome part whereof are thus briefly ſummed up by himſelf: "In labours abundant, in ſtripes above meaſure, in priſons frequent, in death oft; thrice beaten with rods, once ſtoned, thrice ſuffered ſhipwreck, a night and a day in the deep. In journeying often, in perils by his countrymen, in perils by the heathens, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderneſs, in perils in the ſea, in perils among falſe brethren; in wearineſs and painfulneſs, in watchings often, in hunger and thirſt: in faſtings often; in cold and nakedneſs, and beſides thoſe things that were without, which daily came upon him, the care of all the churches." An account, though very great, yet far ſhort of what he endured. He did not want for ſolicitations both from Jews and Gentiles; and might, doubtleſs, in ſome meaſure, have made his own terms, would he have been falſe to his truſt, and quitted that way which was then every where ſpoken againſt. But, alas! thoſe things weighed little with our apoſtle, who "counted not his life dear unto him, ſo that he might finiſh his courſe with joy, and the miniſtry which he had received of the Lord Jeſus." And therefore, when he thought himſelf under the ſentence of death, could triumphantly ſay, "I have fought a good fight, I have finiſhed my courſe, I have kept the faith." In ſhort, he was a man in whom the grace of God was diſplayed

ed with peculiar luſtre, and who gave the moſt convincing proof, that the influence of goſpel-principles exceed all moral and legal obligations.

Saint ANDREW.

CHAP. I.

The Tranſactions of St. Andrew from his Birth, to the Aſcenſion of the bleſſed Jeſus.

THIS apoſtle was born at Bethſaida, a city of Galilee, built on the banks of the lake of Geneſareth, and was ſon to John of Jonas a fiſherman of that town. He was brother to Simon Peter, but whether older or younger is not certainly known, though the generality of the ancients intimate that he was the younger. He was brought up to his father's trade, at which he laboured till our bleſſed Saviour called him to be a fiſher of men, for which he was, by ſome preparatory inſtitutions, qualified, even before the appearance of the Meſſiah.

John the Baptiſt had lately preached the doctrine of repentance; and was, by the generality of the Jews, from the impartiality of his precepts, and the remarkable ſtrictneſs and auſterity of his life, held in great veneration.

In the number of his followers was our apoſtle, who accompanied him beyond Jordan, when the Meſſiah, who had ſome time before been baptized, came that way. Upon his approach, the Baptiſt pointed him out as the Meſſiah, ſtiling him the Lamb of God, the true ſacrifice, that was to expiate the ſins of the world. As ſoon as the Baptiſt had given this character of Jeſus, Andrew, and another diſciple, probably St. John, followed the Saviour of mankind to the place of his abode.

After ſome converſation with him, Andrew departed, and having found his brother Simon, informed him that he had diſcovered the great Meſſiah ſo long expected by the houſe of Jacob; and accordingly brought him to Jeſus. They did not, however, ſtay long with their

Maſter,

Maſter, but returned to their calling.

Something more than a year after, Jeſus paſſing through Galilee, found Andrew and Peter fiſhing on the ſea of Galilee, where he fully ſatisfied them of the greatneſs and divinity of his perſon, by a miraculous draught of fiſhes, which they took at his command. He now told them that they ſhould enter on a different ſeries of labours, and inſtead of fiſh, they ſhould, by the efficacy and influence of their doctrine upon the heart and conſcience, catch men; commanding them to follow him, as his immediate diſciples and attendants; and accordingly they left all and followed him.

CHAP. II.

The Tranſactions of St. Andrew, from our bleſſed Saviour's Aſcenſion, till his Martyrdom.

AFTER the aſcenſion of the bleſſed Jeſus into heaven, and the deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt on the apoſtles, to qualify them for their great undertaking, St. Andrew, according to the generality of ancient writers, was choſen to preach the goſpel in Scythia, and the neighbouring countries.

Accordingly, he departed from Jeruſalem, and firſt travelled through Capadocia, Galatia, and Bythynia, inſtructing the inhabitants in the faith of Chriſt, and continued his journey along the Euxine ſea, into the deſarts of Scythia. An ancient author tells us, that he firſt came to Amynſus, where, being entertained by a Jew, he went into the ſynagogue, preached to them concerning Jeſus, and from the prophecies of the Old Teſtament, proved him to be the Meſſiah, and Saviour of the world. Having converted many here, he ſettled the times of their public meetings, and ordained them prieſts.

He went next to Trapezium, a maritime city on the Euxine ſea; from whence, after viſiting many other places, he came to Nice, where he ſtaid two years preaching, and working miracles with great ſucceſs. After leaving Nice, he paſſed to Nicomedia, and from thence to Chalcedon, whence he ſailed through the Propontis, came by the Euxine ſea to Heraclea, and afterwards to Amaſtris. In all theſe places he met with the greateſt difficulties, but overcame them by an invincible patience and reſolution.

He next went to Sinope, a city ſituated on the ſame ſea, and famous both for the birth and burial of king Mithridates;

Mithridates; here he met with his brother Peter, and ſtaid with him a conſiderable time at this place. The inhabitants of Sinope were moſtly Jews, who, partly from a zeal for their religion, and partly from their barbarous manners, were exaſperated againſt St. Andrew, and entered into a confederacy to burn the houſe in which he lodged. But being diſappointed in their deſign, they treated him with the moſt ſavage cruelty, throwing him on the ground, ſtamping upon him with their feet, pulling and dragging him from place to place; ſome beating him with clubs, ſome pelting him with ſtones, and others, to ſatisfy their brutal revenge, biting off his fleſh with their teeth; till apprehending they had entirely deprived him of life, they caſt him out into the fields. But he miraculouſly recovered, and returned publicly into the city; by which, and other miracles he wrought among them, he converted many from the error of their ways, and induced them to become diſciples of the bleſſed Jeſus.

Departing from Sinope, he returned to Jeruſalem; but he did not continue long in his native country; returning again to the province allotted him for the exerciſe of his miniſtry, which greatly flouriſhed through the power of the divine grace that attended it.

He travelled over Thrace, Macedonia, Theoaly, Achaia, and Epirus, preaching the goſpel, propagating Chriſtianity, and then confirming the doctrine he taught with ſigns and miracles: at laſt he came to Patrea, a city of Achaia, where he gave his laſt and greateſt teſtimony to the goſpel of his divine Maſter, ſealing it with his blood.

Ægenas, Proconſul of Achaia, came at this time to Petrea, where, obſerving that multitudes had abandoned the heathen religion and embraced the goſpel of Chriſt, he had recourſe to every method both of favour and cruelty, to reduce the people to their old idolatry. The apoſtle, whom no difficulties or dangers could deter from performing the duties of his miniſtry, addreſſed himſelf to the Proconſul, calmly putting him in mind, that, being only a judge of men, he ought to revere him who was the ſupreme and impartial judge of all, pay him the divine honours due to his exalted majeſty, and abandon the impieties of his idolatrous worſhip; obſerving to him, that if he would renounce his idolatries, and heartily embrace the

Chriſtian faith, he ſhould, with him and the members who had believed in the Son of God, receive eternal happineſs in the Meſſiah's kingdom. The Proconſul anſwered, that he himſelf ſhould never embrace the religion he mentioned; and that the only reaſon why he was ſo earneſt with him to ſacrifice to the gods was, that thoſe whom he had every where ſeduced, might, by his example, be brought back to the ancient religion they had forſaken. The apoſtle replied, that he ſaw it was in vain to endeavour to perſuade a perſon incapable of ſober counſels, and hardened in his own blindneſs and folly, that with regard to himſelf, he might act as he pleaſed, and if he had any torment greater than another, he might heap that upon him; as the greater conſtancy he ſhewed in his ſufferings for Chriſt, the more acceptable he ſhould be to his Lord and Maſter. Ægenas could hold no longer, but paſſed ſentence of death upon him.

He firſt ordered him to be ſcourged, ſeven lictors ſucceſſively whipping his naked body; and ſeeing his invincible patience and conſtancy, commanded him to be crucified; but to be faſtened to the croſs with cords inſtead of nails, that his death might be more lingering and tedious. As he was led to the place of execution, walking with a chearful and compoſed mind, the people cried out, that a good and innocent man was unjuſtly condemned to die. On his coming near the croſs, he ſaluted it in the following manner: "I have long deſired and expected this happy hour. The croſs has been conſecrated by the body of Chriſt hanging on it, and adorned with his members as with ſo many ineſtimable jewels. I therefore come joyfully and triumphing to it, that it may receive me as a diſciple and follower of him, who once hung upon it, and be the means of carrying me ſafe to my Maſter, being the inſtrument on which he redeemed me."

After offering up his prayers to the throne of grace, and exhorting the people to conſtancy and perſeverance in the faith he had delivered to them, he was faſtened to the croſs, on which he hung two whole days, teaching and inſtructing the people. In the mean time great intereſt was made to the Proconſul to ſpare his life; but the apoſtle earneſtly begged of the Almighty, that he might now depart, and ſeal the truth of his religion with his blood. His prayers were heard, and he immediately expired on the laſt of November,

vember, but in what year is uncertain.

There seems to have been something peculiar in the cross on which he suffered; and is commonly thought to have been a cross decussate, or two pieces of timber crossing each other in the centre, in the form of the letter X, hence usually known by the name of St. Andrew's cross; though some affirm that he was crucified on an olive-tree.

His body being taken from the cross, was decently and honourably interred by Maximillia, a lady of great quality and estate, and whom Nicephorus tells us, was wife to the Proconsul. Constantine the Great afterwards removed his body to Constantinople, and buried it in the great church he had built to the honour of the apostles; but this structure being taken down, some hundred years after, by Justinian the emperor, in order to be rebuilt, the body of St. Andrew was found in a wooden coffin, and again deposited in its proper place.

Saint JAMES the Great.

CHAP. I.

The Transactions of St. James the Great, from his Birth to the Ascension of the Son of God.

THIS apostle who was surnamed the Great, by way of distinction, from another of that name was the son of Zebedee, and by trade a fisherman, to which he applied himself with the greatest assiduity, and was exercising his employment, when the Saviour of the world passing by the sea of Galalee, saw him with his brother in the ship, and called them both to be his disciples. Nor was the call in vain; they chearfully complied with it, and immediately left all to follow him; readily delivering themselves up to perform whatever service he should appoint them.

Soon after this he was called, from the station of an ordinary disciple, to the apostolical office, and even honoured with some particular favours

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beyond moſt of the apoſtles, being one of the three whom our Lord made choice of, as his companions in the more intimate tranſactions of his life, from which the reſt were excluded. Thus, with Peter and his brother John, he attended his Maſter whom he raiſed the daughter of Jairus from the dead; he was admitted to Chriſt's glorious transfiguration on the mount, and when the holy Jeſus was to undergo his bitter agonies in the garden, as preparatory ſufferings to his paſſion, James was one of the three taken to be a ſpectator of them. Nor was it the leaſt inſtance of that particular honour our Lord conferred on theſe apoſtles, that at his calling them to the apoſtolate, he gave them a new name and title. Simon he called Peter, or a rock, and James and John who were brothers Boanerges, or the ſons of thunder.

Some think that this name was given them on account of their loud and bold preaching the goſpel to the world, fearing no threatnings, deſpiſing all oppoſition, and going on thundering in the ears of a drowſy and ſleepy world; rouſing and awakening the conſciences of men with the earneſtneſs and vehemence of their preaching, which reſembled thunder, as the voice of God powerfully ſhakes the natural world, and breaks in pieces the cedar of Lebanon. Others think it relates to the doctrine, they delivered, teaching the great myſteries and ſpeculations of the goſpel in a more profound and lofty ſtrain than the reſt.

But however this be, our bleſſed Saviour, doubtleſs, alluded by this term to the furious and reſolute diſpoſition of theſe two brothers, who ſeem to have been of a more fiery temper than the reſt of the apoſtles, of which we have this memorable inſtance. When our Lord was determined on his journey to Jeruſalem, he ſent ſome of his diſciples before him to make preparations for his coming; but, on their entering a village of Samaria, were rudely rejected from the old grudge that ſubſiſted between the Samaritans and Jews, and becauſe the Saviour by going up to Jeruſalem, ſeemed to ſlight their place of worſhip on mount Gerizim. This piece of rudeneſs and inhumanity was ſo highly reſented by St. James and his brother, that they came to Jeſus, deſiring to know if he would not imitate Elias, by calling down fire from heaven to conſume this barbarous, inhoſpitable people. Thus we

we find the beſt of men are but men, and that corrupt nature will ſometimes appear even in renewed minds. But the holy Jeſus ſoon convinced them of their miſtake, by telling them, that inſtead of deſtroying, he was come to ſave the lives of the children of men.

CHAP. II.

The Tranſactions of St. James, from the Meſſiah's Aſcenſion, to his Sealing the Truth of the Goſpel with his Blood.

SOPHRONIUS tells us that after the aſcenſion of the bleſſed Jeſus, this apoſtle preached to the diſperſed Jews; that is, to thoſe converts who were diſperſed after the death of Stephen. The Spaniſh writers will have it, that after preaching the goſpel in ſeveral parts of Judea and Samaria, he viſited Spain, where he planted Chriſtianity, and appointed ſome ſelect diciples to perfect what he had begun; but if we conſider the ſhortneſs of St. James's life, and that the apoſtles continued in a body at Jeruſalem, even after the diſperſion of the other Chriſtians, we ſhall find it difficult to allow time ſufficient for ſo tedious and difficult a voyage as that was in thoſe early ages: and therefore it is ſafeſt to confine his miniſtry to Judea and the adjacent countries.

Herod, who was a bigot to the Jewiſh religion, as well as deſirous of acquiring the favour of the Jews, began a violent perſecution of the Chriſtians, and his zeal animated him to paſs ſentence of death on St. James immediately.

As he was led to the place of execution, the officer that guarded him to the tribunal, or rather his accuſer, having been converted by that remarkable courage and conſtancy ſhewn by the apoſtle at the time of his trial, repented of what he had done, came and fell down at the apoſtle's feet, and heartily begged pardon for what he had ſaid againſt him. The holy man, after recovering from the ſurprize, tenderly embraced him. "Peace (ſaid he) my ſon, peace be to thee and the pardon of thy faults." Upon which the officer publicly declared himſelf a Chriſtian, and both were beheaded at the ſame time.

Thus fell the great apoſtle St. James, the firſt proto-martyr, the firſt of that number that gained the crown, taking chearfully that cup of which he had long ſince told his Lord he was ready to drink.

Saint JOHN the Evangeliſt.

CHAP. I.

The Tranſactions of St. John, from his Birth to the Aſcenſion of his great Lord and Maſter.

WE have already given an account of the deſcent of our Evangeliſt, who was, in all probability, a follower of John the Baptiſt, and is thought to be that other diſciple, who, in the firſt chapter of his goſpel, is ſaid to have been preſent with Andrew, when John declared Jeſus to be "the Lamb of God," and thereupon to have followed him to the place of his abode.

He was by much the youngeſt of the apoſtles, yet he was admitted into as great a ſhare of his Maſter's confidence as any of them. He was one of thoſe to whom he communicated the moſt private paſſages of his life; one of thoſe whom he took with him when he raiſed the daughter of Jarius from the dead; one of thoſe to whom he exhibited a ſpecimen of divinity, in his transfiguration on the mount; one of thoſe who were preſent at his conference with Moſes and Elias, and heard that voice which declared him "the beloved ſon of God;" and one of thoſe who were companions in his ſolitude, moſt retired devotions, and bitter agonies in the garden.

Theſe inſtances of particular favour, our apoſtle endeavoured in ſome meaſure to anſwer by returns of particular kindneſs and conſtancy. For though he at firſt deſerted his Maſter on his apprehenſion, yet he ſoon diſcovered himſelf, and came back to ſeek his Saviour, confidently entered the high prieſt's hall, followed our Lord through the ſeveral particulars of his trial, and at laſt waited on him at his execution, owning him, as well as being owned by him, in the midſt of armed ſoldiers, and in the thickeſt crowds of his moſt inveterate enemies. Here it was that our great Redeemer committed to his care his ſorrowing and diſconſolate mother, with his dying breath. And certainly the holy Jeſus could not have given a more honourable teſtimony of his particular reſpect, and kindneſs to St. John, than by leaving his own mother to his

his truſt and care, and ſubſtituting him to ſupply that duty he himſelf paid her, while he reſided in this vale of ſorrow.

CHAP. II.

The Tranſactions of St. John, from the Aſcenſion of Chriſt to his Death.

AFTER the aſcenſion of the Saviour of the World, when the apoſtles made a diviſion of the province among themſelves, that of Aſia fell to the ſhare of St. John, though he did not immediately enter upon his charge, but continued at Jeruſalem, till the death of the bleſſed Virgin, which happened about fifteen years after our Lord's aſcenſion. Being releaſed from the truſt committed to his care by his dying Maſter, he retired into Aſia, and induſtriouſly applied himſelf to the propagation of Chriſtianity, preaching where the goſpel had not yet been known, and confirming it where it was already planted. Many churches of note and eminence were founded by him, particularly thoſe of Smyrna, Pergamus, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodocea, and others; but his chief place of reſidence was at Epheſus, where St. Paul had many years before founded a church, and conſtituted Timothy biſhop of it.

After ſpending ſeveral years at Epheſus, he was accuſed to Domitian, who had begun a perſecution againſt the chriſtians, as an eminent aſſerter of atheiſm and impiety, and a public ſubverter of the religion of the empire; ſo that by his command, the proconſul ſent him, bound, to Rome, where he met with the treatment that might have been expected from ſo barbarous a prince, being thrown into a chaldron of boiling oil. But the Almighty, who reſerved him for farther ſervice in the vineyard of his ſon, reſtrained the heat, as he did in the fiery furnace of old, and delivered him from this ſeemingly unavoidable deſtruction. And ſurely one would have thought that ſo miraculous a deliverance might have been ſufficient to have perſuaded any rational man, that the religion he taught was from God, and that he was protected from danger by the hand of Omnipotence. But miracles themſelves were not ſufficient to convince this cruel emperor, or abate his fury. He ordered St. John to be tranſported to a diſconſolate iſland in the Archipelago, called Patmos, where he continued ſeveral years inſtructing the poor inhabitants in the knowledge of the chriſtian faith; and here, about the

end

end of Domitian's reign, he wrote his book of Revelations, exhibiting by viſions, and prophetical repreſentations, the ſtate and condition of Chriſtianity in the future periods and ages of the church.

After the death of Domitian, and the ſucceſſion of Narva, who repealed all the odious acts of his predeceſſor, and by public edicts recalled thoſe whom the fury of Domitian had baniſhed, St John returned to Aſia, and fixed his ſeat again at Epheſus; the rather becauſe the people of that city had lately martyred Timothy their Biſhop. Here, with the aſſiſtance of ſeven other biſhops, he took upon himſelf the government of the large dioceſe of Aſia Minor, and diſpoſed of the clergy in the beſt manner that the circumſtances of thoſe times would permit, ſpending his time in an indefatigable execution of his charge, travelling from eaſt to weſt, to inſtruct the world in the principles of the holy religion he was ſent to propagate.

In this manner St. John continued to labour in the vineyard of his great Maſter, till death put a period to all his toils and ſufferings; which happened in the beginning of Trajan's reign, in the ninety-eighth year of his age; and he was, according to Euſebius, buried near Epheſus.—St. John ſeems always to have led a ſingle life; though ſome of the ancients tell us he was a married man. He was not poliſhed by any ſtudy or arts of learning; but what was wanting from human art was abundantly ſupplied by the excellent conſtitution of his mind, and that fullneſs of divine grace with which he was adorned. His humility was admirable, ſtudiouſly concealing his own honour. In his epiſtles he never ſtiles himſelf either apoſtle or evangeliſt; the title of preſbyter, or elder, is all he aſſumes, and probably in regard to his age as much as his office. In his goſpel, when he ſpake of "the diſciple whom Jeſus loved," he conſtantly conceals his own name, leaving the reader to diſcover who he meant. Love and charity he praiſed himſelf, and affectionately preſſed them upon others: the great love of his Saviour towards him ſeems to have inſpired his ſoul with a large and more generous charity than the reſt. This is the great vein that runs through all his writings, eſpecially his epiſtles, where he urges it as the great and peculiar law of chriſtianity, and without which all other

other pretences to the religion of the holy Jeſus are vain and frivolous, uſeleſs and inſignificant. And this was his conſtant practice to the very hour of his diſſolution; for when age and the infirmities of nature had rendered him ſo weak, that he was unable to preach to the people any longer, he was led, at every public meeting, to the church, at Epheſus, and generally repeated to them the ſame precepts, "Little children, love one another." And when his hearers, wearied with the conſtant repetition of the ſame thing, aſked him, why he never varied his diſcourſe, he anſwered, Becauſe, to love one another, was the command of our bleſſed Saviour, and if they did nothing more, this alone was ſufficient.

The greateſt inſtance of our apoſtle's care for the ſouls of men is diſplayed in the writings he left to poſterity. The firſt of which in time, though placed laſt in the ſacred canon, is his Apocalypſa, or book of Revelations, which he wrote during his baniſhment at Patmos.

Next to the Apocalypſa, in order of time, are his three epiſtles, the firſt of which is catholic, calculated for all times and places, containing the moſt excellent rules for the conduct of a chriſtian life, preſſing to holineſs and pureneſs of manners, and not to be ſatisfied with an empty profeſſion of religion, not to be led away with the crafty inſinuation of ſeducers, and cautioning men againſt the poiſonous principles and practices of the Gnoſtics. The apoſtle here, according to his uſual modeſty, conceals his name, it being of more conſequence to a wiſe man what is ſaid, than he who ſays it. It appears from St. Auguſtine, that this epiſtle was anciently inſcribed to the Parthians, becauſe, in all probability St. John preached the goſpel in Parthia. The other two epiſtles are but ſhort, and directed to particular perſons; the one to a lady of great quality, the other to the charitable and hoſpitable Gaius, the kindeſt friend, and the moſt courteous entertainer of all indigent chriſtians.

Before he undertook the taſk of writing the goſpel, he cauſed a general faſt to be kept by all the Aſian churches, to implore the bleſſing of heaven on ſo great and momentuous an undertaking. When this was done he ſet about the work, and compleated it in ſo excellent and ſublime a manner, that the ancients generally compared him to an eagle's ſoaring aloft among the clouds, whi-

ther the weak eye of man was not able to follow him. "Among all the evangelical writers, ſays St. Baſil, none are like St. John, the ſon of thunder, for the ſublimity of his ſpeech, and the height of his diſcourſes, which are beyond any man's capacity fully to reach and comprehend." "St. John, as a true ſon of thunder, ſays Epiphanius, by a loftineſs of ſpeech peculiar to himſelf, acquaints us, as it were out of the clouds and dark receſſes of wiſdom, with the divine doctrine of the Son of God."

Such is the character given of the writings of this great apoſtle and evangeliſt, who was honoured with the endearing title of being the beloved diſciple of the Son of God; a writer ſo profound, as to deſerve, by way of eminence, the character of St. John the Divine.

Saint PHILIP.

CHAP. I.

The Tranſactions of St. Philip, from his Birth, till the Time of Chriſt's Aſcenſion.

THIS apoſtle was a native of Bethſaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. He had the honour of being firſt called to be a diſciple of the great Meſſiah, which happened in the following manner: our bleſſed Saviour, ſoon after his return from the wilderneſs, where he had been tempted by the devil, met with Andrew and his brother Peter, and after ſome diſcourſe parted from them. The next day, as he was paſſing through Galilee, he found Philip, whom he preſently commanded to follow him, the conſtant form he made uſe of in calling his diſciples, and thoſe that inſeparably attended him. So that the prerogative of being firſt called evidently belongs to St. Philip, he being the firſt of our Lord's diſciples; for though Andrew and John were the firſt that came and converſed with the Saviour of the world, yet they immediately returned to their occupation, and were not called till ſome time after.

It cannot be doubted, that notwithſtanding St. Philip was a native of Galilee, yet he was excellently ſkilled

ſkilled in the law and the prophets. Metaphraſtes aſſures us, that he had, from his childhood, been well educated; that he frequently read over the books of Moſes, and attentively conſidered the propheſies relating to the Meſſiah.

Nor was our apoſtle idle after the honour he had received of being called to attend the Saviour of the world; he immediately imparted the glad tidings of the Meſſiah's appearance to his brother Nathaniel, and conducted him to him.

It was to this apoſtle that our Saviour aſked the queſtion, where they ſhould find bread ſufficient to ſatisfy the hunger of ſo great a multitude? Philip anſwered, that it was not eaſy to procure ſo large a quantity; not conſidering that it was equally eaſy for the Almighty power to feed double the number, when it pleaſed to exert itſelf.

It was alſo to the ſame apoſtle, that the Gentile proſelytes, who came up to worſhip at Jeruſalem, applied, when they were deſirous to ſee the Saviour of the world. And it was with him our Lord had held a diſcourſe a little before the paſchal ſupper.

The compaſſionate Jeſus had been fortifying their minds with proper conſiderations againſt his departure from them, and had told them, that he was going to prepare for them a place in the manſions of the heavenly Canaan; that he was "the way, the truth, and the life: that no man could come to the Father but by him; and that knowing him they both knew and had ſeen the Father." Philip, not thoroughly underſtanding the force of his Maſter's reaſonings, begged of him that he would "ſhew them the Father." Our Lord gently reproved his ignorance, that after attending ſo long to his inſtructions, he ſhould not know, that he was the image of his Father, the expreſs characters of his infinite wiſdom, power and goodneſs appearing in him; that he ſaid and did nothing but by his Father's appointment; which, if they did not believe, his miracles were a ſufficient evidence: that ſuch demands were therefore unneceſſary and impertinent; and that it was an indication of great weakneſs in him, after three years education under his diſcipline and inſtitution, to appear ſo ignorant, with regard to theſe particulars.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

The Tranſactions of St. Philip, from the Aſcenſion of Chriſt, to his Martyrdom.

THE ancients tell us, that in the diſtribution made by the apoſtles of the ſeveral regions of the world, the Upper Aſia fell to Saint Philip, where he laboured with an indefatigable diligence and induſtry. By the conſtancy and power of his preaching, and the efficacy of his miracles, he gained numerous converts, whom he baptized into the chriſtian faith, curing at once their bodies of infirmities and diſtempers, and their ſouls of errors and idolatry. He continued with them a conſiderable time in ſettling churches, and appointing them guides and miniſters of religion.

After ſeveral years ſucceſsfully exerciſing his apoſtolical office in Upper Aſia, he came at laſt to Hierapolis in Phrygia, a city remarkably rich and populous, but at the ſame time over-run with the moſt enormous idolatry.

St. Philip, being grieved to ſee the people ſo wretchedly enſlaved by error and ſuperſtition, continually offered his addreſſes to heaven, till, by his prayers, and often calling on the name of Chriſt, he procured the death, or, at leaſt, the vaniſhing of an enormous ſerpent, to which they paid adoration.

Having thus demoliſhed their deity, he demonſtrated to them how rediculous and unjuſt it was, for them to pay divine honours to ſuch odious creatures; ſhewed them that God alone was to be worſhipped, as the great parent of all the world, who, in the beginning, made man, after his glorious image, and when fallen from that innocent and happy ſtate, ſent his own Son into the world to redeem him. That in order to perform his glorious work, he died on the croſs, and roſe again from the dead, and at the end of the world, would come again, to raiſe all the ſons of men from the chambers of the duſt, and ſentence them to everlaſting rewards and puniſhments. This diſcourſe rouſed them from their lethargy; they were aſhamed of their late idolatry, and great numbers embraced the doctrines of the goſpel.

This provoked the great enemy of mankind, and he had recourſe to his old methods, cruelty and perſecution. The magiſtrates of the city ſeized the apoſtle, and having thrown him into priſon, cauſed him to be ſcourged. When this act of cruelty was

was over, he was led to execution, and being bound, was hanged againſt a pillar; or, according to others, crucified. The apoſtle being dead, his body was taken down (by Saint Bartholomew, his fellow-labourer in the goſpel, and Mariamne, St. Philip's ſiſter, the conſtant companion of his travels) and decently buried; after which they confirmed the people in the faith of Chriſt, and departed from them.

Saint BARTHOLOMEW.

CHAP. I.

The Tranſactions of St. Bartholomew from his Birth to the Aſcenſion of his great Maſter.

THIS apoſtle is mentioned among the twelve immediate diſciples of our Lord, under the appellation of Bartholomew, though it is evident, from divers paſſages of ſcripture, that he was alſo called Nathaniel. We ſhall therefore, in our account of his life, conſider the names of Nathaniel and Bartholomew, as belonging to one and the ſame perſon.

With regard to his deſcent and family, ſome are of opinion, that he was a Syrian, and deſcended from the Ptolemies of Egypt. But it is plain, from the evangelical hiſtory, that he was a Galilean, St. John having expreſſly told us, that Nathaniel was of Cana in Galilee.

The ſcripture is ſilent with regard to his trade and manner of life, though, from ſome circumſtances, there is room to imagine that he was a fiſherman. He was, at his firſt coming to Chriſt, introduced by Philip, who told him they had now found the long-expected Meſſiah, ſo often foretold by Moſes and the prophets "Jeſus of Nazareth, the ſon of Joſeph." And when he objected that the Meſſiah could not be born in Nazareth, Philip deſired him to come and ſatisfy himſelf.

At his approach our bleſſed Saviour ſaluted him with this honourable character, that he was "an Iſraelite indeed," a man of true ſimplicity and honeſty, and indeed his ſimplicity particularly appears in this, that when he was told of Jeſus, he did not object againſt the meanneſs of his parents, or the narrowneſs

of their fortunes, but only against the place of his birth, which, as he juſtly obſerved, could not be Nazareth, the ſcripture peremptorily foretelling that the Meſſiah ſhould be born at Bethlehem. By this, therefore, he appeared to be a true Iſraelite, one that waited for redemption in Iſrael, which, from the times mentioned in the ſcripture predictions, he knew to be near at hand.

He was greatly ſurprized at our Lord's ſalutations, wondering how he could know him at firſt ſight, being certain he had never before ſeen his face. But he was anſwered, that he had ſeen him while he was yet under the fig-tree, even before Philip called him. Convinced by this inſtance of our Lord's divinity, he preſently made this confeſſion, that he was now ſure that Jeſus was the promiſed Meſſiah, that Son of God, whom he had appointed to govern his church. Our bleſſed Saviour told him, that if from this inſtance he could believe him to be the Meſſiah, he ſhould have far greater arguments to confirm his faith; for that he ſhould hereafter behold the heavens opened to receive him, and the angels viſibly appearing to attend his triumphant entrance into the heavenly Canaan.

CHAP. II.

The Tranſactions of St. Bartholomew, from the Aſcenſion of Chriſt, to his Martyrdom.

OUR apoſtle having his peculiar ſpot allotted him, for the promulgation of the goſpel of his bleſſed Maſter, who had now aſcended into Heaven, and diſperſed his holy Spirit to fit and qualify his diſciples for the important work, viſited different parts of the world, to preach the goſpel, and penetrated as far as the hither India.

After ſpending a conſiderable time in India, and the eaſtern extremities of Aſia, he returned to the northern and weſtern parts, and we find him at Hierapolis in Phrygia, labouring, in conſort with St. Philip, to plant Chriſtianity in thoſe parts; and to convince the blind idolaters of the evil of their ways, and direct them in the paths that lead to eternal Salvation. This enraging the bigoted magiſtrates, he was, together with Philip, deſigned for martyrdom, and in order to this faſtened to a croſs; but their conſciences prickling them for a time, they took him down and ſet him at liberty.

From hence he retired into Lycaonia, and St. Chryſoſtom aſſures us, that he inſtructed and trained

up the inhabitants in the christian discipline. His last remove was to Albanople in Great Armenia, a place miserably over-run with idolatry, from which he laboured to reclaim the people. But his endeavours to "turn them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God," were so far from having the desired effect, that it provoked the magistrates, who prevailed on the governor to put him to death, which he chearfully underwent, sealing the truth of the doctrine he had preached with his blood.

Saint MATTHEW.

CHAP. I.

The Transactions of St. Matthew, from his Birth, to the ascension of Christ.

ST. Matthew, called also Levi, though a Roman officer, was a true Hebrew, and probably a Galilean: his trade was that of a publican, or tax-gatherer to the Romans; an office detested by the generality of Jews on two accounts; first, because they used every method of oppression to make the people pay their rents to the Romans; and secondly, because they demanded tribute of the Jews, who considered themselves as a free people, having received that privilege from God himself. And hence they had a common proverb among them "take not a wife out of that family in which there is a publican, for they are all publicans." That is, they are all thieves, robbers, and notorious sinners. And to this proverbial custom our blessed Saviour alludes, when speaking of a hardened sinner, on whom neither private reproofs, nor the public censures and admonitions of the church, can prevail, "Let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican."

Our blessed Saviour having cured a person long afflicted with the palsy, retired out of Capernaum, to walk by the sea-side, where he taught the people that flocked after him.------

Here

Here he ſaw Matthew ſitting in his office, and called him to follow him. The man was rich, had a large and profitabe employment, was a wiſe and prudent perſon, and doubtleſs underſtood what it would coſt him to comply with the call of Jeſus. He was not ignorant that he muſt exchange wealth for poverty, a cuſtom-houſe for a priſon, rich and powerful maſters, for a naked and deſpiſed Saviour. But he overlooked all theſe conſiderations, left all his intereſt and relations, to become our Lord's diſciple, and to embrace a more ſpiritual way of commerce and traffic.

The phariſees, who ſought all opportunities of raiſing objections againſt the doctrine of the bleſſed Jeſus, took this opportunity of ſuggeſting to his diſciples, that it was highly unbecoming ſo pure and holy a perſon, as their Maſter pretended himſelf to be, ſhould converſe ſo familiarly with the worſt of men, with publicans and ſinners, perſons infamous to a proverb. But he readily replied to them, that theſe were the ſick, and therefore needed the phyſician; that his company was of moſt conſequence, where the ſouls of men moſt required it; that God himſelf preferred works of mercy and charity, eſpecially in doing good to the ſouls of men, infinitely above all ritual obſervances; and that the principal deſign of his coming into the world was not to call the righteous or thoſe who, like themſelves, vainly pretended to be ſo, but ſinners, humble ſelf-convinced ſinners, to repentance.

After St. Matthew's election to the apoſtleſhip, he continued with the reſt, till the aſcenſion of his great and beloved Maſter; but the evangelical writers have recorded nothing particular concerning him during that period.

CHAP. II.

The Tranſactions of St. Matthew, from the Aſcenſion of Chriſt to his Martrydom.

AFTER our bleſſed Saviour's aſcenſion into heaven, St. Matthew, for the firſt eight years at leaſt, preached in different parts of Judea; but afterwards he left the country of Paleſtine to convert the Gentile world. Before his departure, he was intreated by the Jewiſh converts to write the hiſtory of the life and actions of the bleſſed Jeſus, and to leave it among them as a ſtanding monument of what he had ſo often delivered to them in his ſermons. This he readily complied with, as we

we ſhall more particularly mention, in giving an account of his goſpel.

After his leaving Judea, he travelled into ſeveral parts, eſpecially Ethiopia, but the particular places he viſited are not known with any certainty.

However, after labouring indefatigably in the vineyard of his Maſter, he ſuffered martyrdom at a city of Ethiopia, called Naddabar; but what kind of death is not abſolutely known; though the general opinion is, that he was ſlain with an halbert.

St. Matthew was a remarkable inſtance of the power of religion, in bringing men to a better temper of mind. If we reflect upon his circumſtances while he continued a ſtranger to the great Redeemer of mankind, we ſhall find that the love of the world had poſſeſſed his heart. But notwithſtanding this, no ſooner did Chriſt call him, than he abandoned, without the leaſt ſcruple, or heſitation, all his riches; nay he not only renounced his lucrative trade, but ran the greateſt hazard of diſpleaſing the maſters who employed him, for quitting their ſervice without giving them the leaſt notice, and leaving his accounts in confuſion. Had our bleſſed Saviour appeared as a ſecular prince, clothed with temporal power and authority, it would have been no wonder for him to have gone over to his ſervice: but when he appeared under all the circumſtances of meanneſs and diſgrace, when he ſeems to promiſe his followers nothing but miſery and ſufferings, in this life, and to propoſe no other rewards than the inviſible encouragements of another world, his change appears truly wonderful and ſurpriſing---but divine grace can ſubdue all oppoſition.

His contempt of the world appeared in his exemplary temperance and abſtemiouſneſs from all delights and pleaſures; nay, even from the ordinary conveniences and accommodations of life. He was mean and modeſt in his own opinion, always preferring others to himſelf; for whereas the other evangeliſts, in deſcribing the apoſtles by pairs, conſtantly place him before St. Thomas, he modeſtly gives him the precedence. The reſt of the evangeliſts are careful to mention the honour of his apoſtleſhip, but ſpeak of his former ſordid, diſhoneſt, and diſgraceful courſe of life, only under the name of Levi; while he himſelf ſets it down with all its circumſtances, under his own proper and

common name. A conduct, which at once condemns the prudence and candour of the apoſtle, and ſuggeſts to us this uſeful reflection, That the greateſt ſinners are not excluded from divine grace; nor can any, if penitent, have juſt reaſon to deſpair, when publicans and ſinners find mercy at the throne of grace.

The laſt thing we ſhall remark in the life of this apoſtle is his goſpel, written at the entreaty of the Jewiſh converts, while he abode in Paleſtine; but at what time is uncertain; ſome will have it to be written eight, ſome fifteen, and ſome thirty years after our Lord's aſcenſion. It was originally written in Hebrew; but ſoon after tranſlated into Greek by one of the diſciples.

After the Greek tranſlation was admitted, the Hebrew copy was chiefly owned and uſed by the Nazariæi, a middle ſect between Jews and Chriſtians; with the former they adhered to the rites and ceremonies of the Moſaic law, and with the latter they believed in Chriſt, and embraced his religion; and hence this goſpel has been ſtyled, "The Goſpel according to the Hebrews," and "The Goſpel of the Nazarenes."

Saint THOMAS.

CHAP. I.

The Tranſactions of St. Thomas, from his Birth to the Aſcenſion of our bleſſed Saviour.

EVANGELICAL hiſtory is entirely ſilent, with regard either to the country or kindred of St. Thomas. It is, however, certain, that he was a Jew, and in all probability a Galilean.

He was, together with the reſt, called to the apoſtleſhip; and not long after gave an eminent inſtance of his being ready to undergo the moſt melancholy fate that might attend him. For when the reſt of the apoſtles diſſuaded their Maſter from

from going into Judea at the time of Lazarus's death, becauſe the Jews lately endeavoured to ſtone him. Thomas deſired them not to hinder his journey thither, though it might coſt them all their lives. "Let us go (ſaid he) that we may die with him:" concluding, that inſtead of Lazarus being raiſed from the dead, they ſhould all, like him, be placed in the chambers of the duſt.

When the holy Jeſus, a little before his ſufferings, had been ſpeaking to them of the joys of heaven, and had told them, that he was going to prepare manſions for them, that they might follow him, and that they knew both the place whither he was going, and the way thither; our apoſtle replied, that they knew not whither he was going, much leſs the way that would lead them thither. To which our Lord returned this ſhort but ſatisfactory anſwer, "I am the way," I am the perſon whom the Father hath ſent into the world, to ſhew mankind the paths that lead to eternal life, and therefore you cannot miſs the way, if you follow my example.

After the diſciples had ſeen their great Maſter expire on the croſs, their minds were diſtracted by hopes and fears, concerning his reſurrection, about which, they were not then fully ſatisfied; which engaged him the ſooner to haſten his appearance, that by the ſenſible manifeſtations of himſelf, he might put the matter beyond all poſſibility or diſpute. Accordingly the very day in which he aroſe from the dead, he came into the houſe where they were aſſembled, while, for fear of the Jews, the doors were cloſe ſhut about them, and gave them ſufficient aſſurance, that he was riſen from the dead. At this meeting Thomas was abſent, having probably never joined their company ſince their diſperſion in the garden, when every one's fears prompted him to conſult his own ſafety. At his return they told him that the Lord had appeared to them, but he obſtinately refuſed to give credit to what they ſaid, or to believe that it was really he, preſuming it rather a ſpectre or apparition, unleſs he might ſee the very print of the nails, and feel the wounds in his hands and ſide.

But our compaſſionate Saviour would not take the advantage of his perverſe obſtinacy, but on that day ſeven-night came again to them, as they were ſolemnly met at their devotions, and called to Thomas, bid him look upon his hands, put his

his fingers into the print of the nails, and thruſt his hand into his ſide, to ſatisfy his faith, by a demonſtration from the ſenſes. Thomas was ſoon convinced of his error and obſtinacy, and confeſſed that he now acknowledged him to be his Lord and Maſter, exclaiming, my Lord, and my God. Our Lord anſwered, it was happy for him that he believed the teſtimony of his own ſenſes; but that it would have been more commendable in him to have believed without ſeeing, becauſe it was foretold, that the Son of God ſhould burſt the chains of death, and riſe again from the dead.

CHAP. II.

The Tranſactions of St. Thomas, from the Aſcenſion of the Son of God, to his Death.

OUR great Redeemer having, according to promiſe before his aſcenſion, poured an extraordinary effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt upon the diſciples, to qualify them for the great work of preaching the goſpel. St. Thomas, as well as the reſt, preached the goſpel in ſeveral parts of Judea; and after the diſperſion of the Chriſtian church in Jeruſalem, he repaired into Parthia, the province aſſigned him for his miniſtry. After which, as Sempronius and others inform us, he preached the goſpel to the Medes, Perſians, Carmans, Hyrcani, Bractarians, and the neighbouring nations. During his preaching in Perſia, he is ſaid to have met with the magi, or wiſe men, who had taken that long journey at our Saviour's birth to worſhip him, whom he baptized and took with him, as his companions and aſſiſtants in propagating the goſpel.

Leaving Perſia he travelled into Ethiopia, preaching the glad tidings of the goſpel, healing their ſick, and working other miracles, to prove he had his commiſſion from on high. And after travelling through theſe countries, he entered India.

When the Portugueſe firſt viſited theſe countries, after their diſcovery of a paſſage by the Cape of Good Hope, they received the following particulars, partly from conſtant and uncontroverted traditions preſerved by the Chriſtians in thoſe parts; namely, that St. Thomas came firſt to Socotora, an iſland in the Arabian ſea, and then to Cranganor, from whence, having converted many from the error of their ways, he travelled farther into the eaſt; and having ſucceſsfully preached the goſpel, returned back to the kingdom of Coromandel, where at Mali pur, the metropolis

metropolis of the kingdom, not far from the mouth of the Ganges, he began to erect a place for divine worſhip, till prohibited by the idolatrous prieſts, and Sagamo, prince of that country. But after performing ſeveral miracles, the work was ſuffered to proceed, and Sagamo himſelf embraced the Chriſtian faith, whoſe example was ſoon followed by great numbers of his friends and ſubjects.

This remarkable ſucceſs alarmed the Brachmans, who plainly perceived that their religion would be ſoon extirpated, unleſs ſome method could be found of putting a ſtop to the progreſs of Chriſtianity: they therefore reſolved to put the apoſtle to death. At a ſmall diſtance from the city was a tomb, whither St. Thomas often retired for private devotions. Hither the Brachmans and their armed followers purſued him, and while he was at prayer, they firſt ſhot at him a ſhower of darts, after which one of the prieſts ran him through the body with a lance.

His corpſe was taken up by his diſciples, and buried in the church he had lately erected, and which was afterwards improved into a fabric of great magnificence.

St. Chryſoſtom ſays, that St. Thomas, who at firſt was the weakeſt and moſt incredulous of all the apoſtles, became, through Chriſt's condeſcenſion to ſatisfy his ſcruples, and the power of the divine grace, the moſt active and invincible of them all; travelling over moſt parts of the world, and living without fear in the midſt of barbarous nations, through the efficacy of that Almighty power, which can make the weakeſt veſſels to perform acts of the greateſt difficulty and moment.

Saint JAMES the Leſs.

IT has been doubted by ſome, whether this was the ſame with that St. James, who was afterwards biſhop of Jeruſalem, two people of this name being mentioned in the ſacred writings, namely, St. James the Great, and St. James the Leſs, both apoſtles. The ancients mention a third, ſirnamed the Juſt, which they will have to be diſtinct from the former, and biſhop of Jeruſalem. But this opinion is built on a weak foundation, for nothing is plainer than that St. James the apoſtle, whom

St. Paul calls "our Lord's brother," and reckons, with Peter and John, one of the pillars of the church, was the ſame who preſided among the apoſtles, doubtleſs by virtue of his epiſcopal office, and determined the cauſes in the ſynod of Jeruſalem. It is reaſonable to think that he was the ſon of Joſeph, afterwards the huſband of Mary, by his firſt wife, whom St. Jerom ſtiles Eſcha, and that ſhe was the daughter of Aggi, brother to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptiſt. Hence he was reputed our Lord's brother. We find indeed ſeveral mentioned as the brethren of our Saviour in the evangelical hiſtory; but in what ſenſe is greatly controverted by the ancients. St. Jerom, St. Chryſoſtom, and ſome others, will have them to be called, from their being the ſons of Mary, couſin-german, or, according to the Hebrew idiom, ſiſter to the Virgin Mary. But Euſebius, Epiphanius, and many others, tell us, they were the children of Joſeph by a former wife. This, indeed, ſeems moſt natural, and beſt agrees with what the evangeliſt ſays of them, when they enumerate the queſtions of the Jews: "Is not this the carpenter's ſon? Is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren James and Joſes, Simeon and Judas? and his ſiſters are they not all with us? whence then has this man theſe things?" From hence it is plain, that the Jews underſtood theſe perſons not to be Chriſt's kinſmen only, but his brethren, the ſame carpenter's ſon having the ſame relation to him, that Jeſus himſelf had. With regard to the place of his birth, the ſacred hiſtory is ſilent.

After the reſurrection, he was honoured with a particular appearance of our Lord to him, which, though paſſed over in ſilence by the Evangeliſts, is recorded by St. Paul.

Some time after this appearance, he was choſen biſhop of Jeruſalem, preferred before all the reſt for his near relation to Chriſt; and for the ſame reaſon we find Simeon choſen to be his immediate ſucceſſor in that ſee, becauſe, after St. James, he was our Lord's next kinſman: a conſideration that made Peter and the two ſons of Zebedee, though they had been peculiarly honoured by our Saviour, not to contend for this high and honourable ſtation, but freely choſe James the Juſt biſhop of Jeruſalem.

When St. Paul came to Jeruſalem after his converſion, he applied to St. James, and was by him honoured with "the right hand of fellowſhip.

ſhip. And it was to St. James that Peter ſent the news of his miraculous deliverence out of priſon, "go (ſaid he) ſhew theſe things unto James and to the brethren;" that is, to the whole church, eſpecially to St. James, the paſtor of it.

He performed every part of his duty with all poſſible care and induſtry omitting no particular neceſſary to be obſerved by a diligent and faithful guide of ſouls; he ſtrengthened the weak, inſtructed the ignorant, reproved the obſtinate; and, by the conſtancy of his ſermons, conquered the ſtubbornneſs of that perverſe and refractory generation he had to deal with, many of the nobler and better ſort of whom were perſuaded to embrace the chriſtian faith.

But a perſon ſo careful, ſo ſucceſsful in his charge, could not fail of awakening the ſpite and malice of his enemies; a ſort of men of whom the apoſtle has given too true a character, that "they pleaſe not God, and are contrary to all men." They were vexed to ſee St. Paul had eſcaped their hands, by appealing unto Cæſar; and therefore turned their fury againſt St. James: but being unable to effect their deſign under the government of Feſtus, they determined to attempt it under the procuratorſhip of Albinus his ſucceſſor, Ananus the younger, of the ſect of the Sadducees, being high-prieſt.

In order to this a council was ſummoned, and the apoſtle, with others, arraigned and condemned as violators of the law. But that the action might appear more plauſible and popular, the Scribes and Phariſees, maſters in the art of diſſimulation, endeavoured to enſnare him: at their firſt coming, they told him, they had all placed the greateſt confidence in him; that the whole nation, as well as they, gave him the title of a juſt man, and one that was no reſpector of perſons; that they therefore deſired he would correct the errors and falſe opinions the people had conceived of Jeſus, whom they conſidered as the Meſſiah, and take this opportunity of the univerſal confluence to the paſchal ſolemnity, to ſet them right in their opinions in this particular, and that he would go with them to the top of the temple, where he might be ſeen and heard by all.

The apoſtle readily conſented, and being advantageouſly placed on the pinnacle of the temple, they addreſſed him in the following manner?

ner: "Tell us, O Juſtus! whom we have all the reaſon in the world to believe, that the people are thus generally led away with the doctrine of Jeſus, who was crucified; tell us, what is this inſtruction of the crucified Jeſus?" To which the apoſtle anſwered, with an audible voice; "Why do you enquire of Jeſus, the ſon of man? He ſits in heaven at the right hand of the Majeſty on high, and will come again in the clouds of heaven." The people below hearing this, glorified the bleſſed Jeſus, and openly proclaimed, "Hoſanna to the ſon of David.

The Scribes and Phariſees now perceived that they had acted fooliſhly; that inſtead of reclaiming, they had confirmed the people in their error: and that there was no way left but to diſpatch him immediately, in order to warn others, by his ſufferings, not to believe in Jeſus of Nazareth. Accordingly, they ſuddenly cried out, That Juſtus himſelf was ſeduced, and become an impoſtor, and immediately threw him from the pinnacle on which he ſtood, into the court below; but not being killed on the ſpot, he recovered himſelf, ſo far as to riſe on his knees, and pray fervently to heaven for his murderers. But malice is too diabolical to be pacified with kindneſs, or ſatisfied with cruelty.

Accordingly, his enemies, vexed that they had not fully accompliſhed their work, poured a ſhower of ſtones upon him, while he was imploring their forgiveneſs at the throne of grace: and one of them, more merciful than the reſt, put an end to his miſery with a fuller's club.

Thus did this great and good man finiſh his courſe in the ninety-ſixth year of his age; and about twenty-four years after our bleſſed Saviour's aſcenſion into heaven. His death was lamented by all good men, even by the ſober and juſt perſons among the Jews themſelves, as Joſephus himſelf confeſſes.

He was a man of exemplary piety and devotion, educated under the ſtricteſt rules and inſtitution of religion. Prayer was his conſtant buſineſs and delight; he ſeems to have lived upon it, and to have continually his converſation in heaven: and he who has told us, "that the prayer of a religious man availeth much," found it ſo by his own experience, heaven lending a more immediate ear to his petitions; ſo that in a time of remarkable drought, on his praying for rain, the clouds melted into fruitful ſhowers.

Nor

Nor was his charity towards men leſs than his piety towards God; he did good to all, watched over the ſouls of men, and ſtudied to advance their eternal welfare.

He was of a remarkable meek and humble temper, honouring what was excellent in others, concealing what was valuable in himſelf. Neither the eminence of his relation to the bleſſed Jeſus, nor the dignity of the place he ſo worthily filled, could induce him to entertain lofty thoughts of himſelf above the reſt of his brethren; on the contrary, he ſtrived to conceal whatever might place him in a higher rank than the other diſciples of the Lord of glory. Though he was brother to the Redeemer of mankind, he ſtiles himſelf only "the ſervant of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt: not ſo much as mentioning his being an apoſtle.

His temperence was admirable, wholly abſtaining from fleſh, drinking neither wine or ſtrong drink, and never uſing the bath. He lived indeed after the ſtricteſt rules of the Nazarite order: and as the mitre he wore on his head evinced his prieſthood, which was rather from Melchiſedeck than Aaron; ſo his never ſhaving his head, or uſing any ointments, his habit and diet, and the great ſeverity of his life ſhewed him to belong to the Nazarite inſtitution, to which he was conſecrated, even from his mother's womb: In ſhort, he was a man of ſo divine a temper, that he was at once the love and wonder of his age; and from the reputation of his holy and religious life, was ſtiled James the Juſt.

He wrote only one epiſtle, probably not long before his martyrdom, as appears from ſome paſſages in it, relating to the near approach of the deſtruction of the Jews. He directed it to the Jewiſh converts, diſperſed up and down thoſe eaſtern countries, to comfort them under their ſufferings, and confirm them againſt error. He ſaw a great degeneracy and declenſion of manners coming on; and that the purity of the Chriſtian faith began to be undermined by the doctrines and practices of the Gnoſtics, who, under pretence of zeal for the legal rites, generally mixed themſelves with the Jews. He beheld libertiniſm flowing in apace, and the way to heaven made ſoft and eaſy, men declaiming againſt good works, as uſeleſs and unneceſſary, and wreſting the ſcriptures to ſubſerve the purpoſe of their luſt and corrupt affections; our

apoſtle therefore recommends that faith which works by love, purifies the heart, and brings forth obedience to the will of God.

Saint SIMON the Zealot.

ST. SIMON, in the catalogue of the apoſtles, is ſtiled Simon the Canaanite, whence ſome conjecture he was born in Cana of Galilee, and others will have him to have been the bridegroom mentioned by St. John, at whoſe marriage our bleſſed Saviour turned the water into wine. But this word has no relation to his country, or the place of his nativity, being derived from the Hebrew word *knah*, which ſignifies *zeal*, and denotes a warm and ſprightly temper. What ſome of the Evangeliſts therefore call *Canaanite*, others, from the Greek word, ſtile *Zealot*: not from his great zeal, his ardent affection to his maſter, and his deſire of advancing his religion in the world, but from his warm active temper, and zealous forwardneſs in ſome particular ſect of religion before his coming to our Saviour.

In order to underſtand this the better, it will be neceſſary to obſerve, that as there were ſeveral ſects and parties among the Jews, ſo there was one, either a diſtinct ſect, or at leaſt a branch of the Phariſees, called the ſect of the Zealots. This ſect took upon them to execute puniſhments in extraordinary caſes; and that not only by the connivance, but with the leave both of the rulers and people, till, in proceſs of time, their zeal degenerated into all kinds of licentiouſneſs and wild extravagance; and they not only became the peſts of the commonwealth at home, but opened the door for the Romans to break in upon them, to their final and irrevocable ruin. They were continually prompting the people to throw off the Roman yoke, and aſſert their natural liberty, taking care, when they had thrown all

all things into confuſion, to make their own advantage of the tumult. Joſephus gives a large account of them, and every where bewails them as the great plague of the nation.

Many attempts were made, eſpecially by Annas the high-prieſt, to reduce them to order, and oblige them to obſerve the rules of ſobriety: but all were in vain. They continued their violent proceedings, and, joining with the Idumeans, committed every kind of outrage. They broke into the ſanctuary, ſlew the prieſts themſelves before the altar, and filled the ſtreets of Jeruſalem with tumults, rapine and blood. Nay, when Jeruſalem was cloſely beſieged by the Roman army, they continued their deteſtable proceedings, creating freſh tumults and factions, and were indeed the principal cauſe of the ill ſucceſs of the Jews in that fatal war.

This is a true account of the ſect of the Zealots; though whatever St. Simon was before, we have no reaſon to ſuſpect, but after his converſation, he was very zealous for the honour of his maſter, and conſidered all thoſe who were enemies to Chriſt, as enemies to himſelf, however near they might be to him in any natural relation. And as he was very exact in all the practical duties of the chriſtian religion, ſo he ſhewed a very ſerious and pious indignation towards thoſe who profeſſed religion, and a faith in Chriſt with their mouths, but diſhonoured their ſacred profeſſion, by their irregular and vicious lives, as many of the firſt profeſſing Chriſtians really did.

St. Simon continued in communion with the reſt of the apoſtles and diſciples at Jeruſalem; and at the feaſt of Penticoſt received the ſame miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghoſt; ſo that he was qualified with the reſt of his brethren for the apoſtolic office. In propagating the goſpel of the ſon of God, we cannot doubt of his exerciſing his gifts with the ſame zeal and fidelity, as his fellow apoſtles, though in what part of the world is uncertain: ſome ſay he went into Egypt, Cyrene, and Africa, preaching the goſpel to the inhabitants of thoſe remote and barbarous countries: and others add, that after he had paſſed through thoſe burning waſtes, he took ſhip and viſited the frozen regions of the north, preaching the goſpel to the inhabitants of the weſtern parts, and even in Britain: where, having converted

verted great multitudes, and ſuſtained the greateſt hardſhips and perſecutions, he was at laſt crucified, and buried in ſome part of Great Britain, but the place where is unknown.

Saint JUDE.

THIS apoſtle is mentioned by three ſeveral names in the evangelical hiſtory, namely, Jude, or Judas Thadeus, and Lebbeus.

He was brother to St. James the Leſs, afterwards biſhop of Jeruſalem, being the ſon of Joſeph, the reputed father of Chriſt, by a former wife. It is not known when, or by what means he became a diſciple of our bleſſed Saviour, nothing being ſaid of him, till we find him in the catalogue of the twelve apoſtles; nor afterwards till Chriſt's laſt ſupper, when diſcourſing with them about his departure, and comforting them with a promiſe, that he would return to them again, meaning after his reſurrection, and that the "world ſhould ſee him no more, though they ſhould ſee him," our apoſtle ſaid to his maſter, "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifeſt thyſelf to us, and not unto the world?"

Paulinus tells us, that the province which fell to the ſhare of St. Jude in the apoſtolic diviſion of the provinces, was Lybia, but he does not tell us whether it was the Cyrenean Lybia, which is thought to have received the goſpel from St. Mark, on the more ſouthern parts of Africa. But however that be, in his firſt ſetting out to preach the goſpel, he travelled up and down Judea, and Galilee; then through Samaria into Idumea, and to the cities of Arabia and the neighbouring countries, and afterwards to Syria and Meſopotamia. Nicephorus adds, that he came at laſt to Edeſſa, where Abagarus governed, and where Thaddeus, one of the ſeventy, had already ſown the ſeeds of the goſpel. Here he perfected what the other had begun; and having, by his ſermons and miracles, eſtabliſhed the religion of Jeſus, he died in peace, but

but others ſay that he was ſlain at Berites, and honourably buried there. The writers of the Latin church are unanimous in declaring, that he travelled into Perſia, where, after great ſucceſs in his apoſtolical miniſtry for many years, he was at laſt, for his free and open reproving the ſuperſtitious rites and cuſtoms of the Magi, cruelly put to death.

St. Jude left only one epiſtle, which is placed the laſt of thoſe ſeven, ſtiled catholic, in the ſacred canon. It hath no particular inſcription as the other ſix have, but is thought to have been primarily intended for the chriſtian Jews, in their ſeveral diſperſions, as St. Peter's epiſtles were. In it he tells them, "that he at firſt intended to write to them in general of the common ſalvation, and eſtabliſh and confirm them in it: but ſeeing the doctrine of Chriſt attacked on every ſide by heretics, he conceived it more neceſſary to ſpend his time in exhorting them to fight manfully in defence of the faith once delivered to the ſaints, and oppoſe the falſe teachers who laboured ſo indefatigably to corrupt it."

It was ſome time before this epiſtle was generally received in the church. The author indeed, like St. James, St. John, and ſometimes St. Paul, does not call himſelf an apoſtle, ſtiling himſelf only "the ſervant of Chriſt." But he has added what is equivalent, "Jude the brother of James, a character that can belong to no one but our apoſtle. And ſurely the humility of a follower of Jeſus ſhould be no objection againſt his writings.

Saint MATTHIAS.

AS Matthias was not an apoſtle of the firſt election, immediately called and choſen of the Son of God himſelf, it cannot be expected, that any account of him can be found in the evangelical hiſtory. He was one of our Lord's diſciples, probably one of the ſeventy that attended on him the whole time of his public miniſtry, and after his death

was elected into the apoſtleſhip, to ſupply the place of Judas, who, after betraying his great Lord and Maſter, laid violent hands on himſelf.

The defection of Judas having made a vacancy in the apoſtolic college, the firſt thing they did after their return from Mount Olivet, when their great Maſter aſcended to the throne of his glory, was to fill up this vacancy with a proper perſon.

Accordingly, two perſons were propoſed, Joſeph, called Barſabas, and Matthias, both duly qualified for the important office. The method of election was by lots, a way common both among Jews and Gentiles, for determining doubtful and difficult caſes, eſpecially in chuſing judges or magiſtrates. And this courſe ſeems to have been taken by the apoſtles, becauſe the Holy Ghoſt was not yet given, by whoſe immediate dictates and inſpirations they were afterwards chiefly guided. The prayer being ended, the lots were drawn, by which it appeared, that Matthias was the perſon, and he was accordingly numbered among the twelve apoſtles.

Not long after this election, the promiſed powers of the Holy Ghoſt were conferred upon the apoſtles, to qualify them for that great and difficult employment upon which they were ſent, the eſtabliſhing the holy religion of the Son of God among the children of men.

St. Matthias ſpent the firſt year of his miniſtry in Judea, where he reaped a very conſiderable harveſt of ſouls, and then travelled into different parts of the world, to publiſh the glad tidings of ſalvation to people who had never yet heard of a Saviour; but the particular parts he viſited are not certainly known.

It is likewiſe uncertain by what kind of death he left the regions of mortality, and ſealed the truth of the goſpel he had ſo aſſiduouſly preached with his blood. Dorotheus ſays, he finiſhed his courſe at Sebaſtople, and was buried there, near the temple of the ſun. An ancient martyrology reports him to have been ſeized by the Jews, and, as a blaſphemer, to have been ſtoned, and then beheaded. But the Greek offices, ſupported herein by ſeveral ancient breviaries, tell us that he was crucified.

Saint

Saint MARK.

THIS apoſtle was deſcended from Jewiſh parents, and of the tribe of Levi. Nor was it uncommon among the Jews to change their names on ſome remarkable revolution or accident of life, or when they intended to travel into any of the European provinces of the Roman empire.

The ancients generally conſidered him as one of the ſeventy diſciples; and Epiphanius expreſſly tells us, that he was one of thoſe, who, taking exception at our Lord's diſcourſe of "eating his fleſh, and drinking his blood, went back, and walked no more with him." But there appears no manner of foundation for theſe opinions, nor likewiſe for that of Nicephorus, who will have him to be the ſon of St. Peter's ſiſter.

Euſebius tells us, that St. Mark was ſent into Egypt by St. Peter, to preach the goſpel, and accordingly planted a church in Alexandria, the metropolis of it: and his ſucceſs was ſo very remarkable, that he converted multitudes both of men and women; perſuading them not only to embrace the chriſtian religion, but alſo to a life of more than ordinary ſtrictneſs.

St. Mark did not confine himſelf to Alexandria, and the oriental parts of Egypt, but removed weſtward to Lybia, paſſing through the countries of Marmartia, Pentapolis, and others adjacent, where, though the people were both barbarous in their manners, and idolatrous in their worſhip, yet, by his preaching and miracles, he prevailed on them to embrace the tenets of the goſpel; nor did he leave them, till he had confirmed them in the faith.

After this long tour he returned to Alexandria, where he preached with the greateſt freedom, ordered and diſpoſed of the affairs of the church, and wiſely provided for a ſucceſſion, by conſtituting governors and paſtors of it. But the reſtleſs enemy of the ſouls of men, would not ſuffer our apoſtle to continue in peace and quietneſs, for while he was aſſiduouſly labouring in the vineyard of his Maſter, the idolatrous inhabitants, about the time of Eaſter,

Eaſter, when they were celebrating the ſolemnities of Serapis, tumultuouſly entered the church, forced St. Mark, then performing divine ſervice, from thence; and binding his feet with cords, dragged him through the ſtreets, and over the moſt craggy places, to the Bucelus, a precipice near the ſea, leaving him there in a loneſome priſon, for that night; but his great and beloved Maſter appeared to him in a viſion, comforting and encouraging his ſoul, under the ruins of his ſhattered body. The next morning early, the tragedy began afreſh, for they dragged him about in the ſame cruel and barbarous manner, till he expired. But their malice did not end with death; they burnt his mangled body, after they had ſo inhumanly deprived it of life: but the Chriſtians, after the helliſh tragedy was over, gathered up his bones and aſhes, and decently interred them near the place where he uſed to preach. His remains were afterwards, with great pomp, removed from Alexandria, to Venice, where they were religiouſly honoured, and he was adopted the titular ſaint and patron of that ſtate.

He ſuffered martyrdom on the 25th of April, but the year is not abſolutely known: the moſt probable opinion however is, that it happened about the end of Nero's reign.

His goſpel, the only writing he has left behind him, was written at the intreaty and earneſt deſire of the converts at Rome, who, not content with having heard St. Peter preach, preſſed St. Mark, his diſciple, to commit to writing an hiſtorical account of what he had delivered to them, which he performed with equal faithfulneſs and brevity, and being peruſed and approved by St. Peter, it was commanded to be publicly read in their aſſemblies. It was frequently ſtiled St. Peter's goſpel, not becauſe he dictated it to St. Mark, but becauſe the latter compoſed it from the accounts St. Peter uſually delivered in his diſcourſe to the people. And this is probably the reaſon of what St. Chryſoſtom obſerves, that in his ſtyle and manner of expreſſion he delights to imitate St. Peter, repreſenting a great deal in a few words. The remarkable impartiality he obſerved in all his relations is plain from hence, that ſo far from concealing the ſhameful lapſe and denial of Peter, his dear tutor and Maſter, he deſcribes it with more aggravating circumſtances, than any of the other evangeliſts.

Saint

Saint LUKE.

THIS diſciple of the bleſſed Jeſus was born at Antioch, the metro olis of Syria, a city celebrated for the pleaſantneſs of its ſituation, the fertility of its ſoil, the riches of its commerce, the wiſdom of its ſenate, and the civility and politeneſs of its inhabitants, by the pens of ſome of the greateſt writers of thoſe times. It was eminent for ſchools of learning, which produced the moſt renowned maſters in the arts and ſciences. So that being born, as it were, in the lap of the muſes, he could not well fail of acquiring an ingenious and liberal education. But he was not content with the learning of his own country; he travelled for improvement into ſeveral parts of Greece and Egypt, and became particularly ſkilled in phyſic, which he made his profeſſion.

But thoſe who would, from this particular, infer the quality of his birth and fortune, ſeem to forget that the healing art was in theſe early times generally practiſed by ſervants; and hence Grotius is of opinion, that St. Luke was carried to Rome, and lived there a ſervant to ſome noble family, in quality of phyſician: but after obtaining his freedom he returned into his own country, and probably continued his profeſſion till his death, it being ſo highly conſiſtent with, and in many caſes ſubſervient to the care of ſouls.

He is alſo famous for his ſkill in another art, namely, painting, appears from an ancient inſcription found in a vault near the church of St. Maria de Via Lata, at Rome, ſuppoſed to have been the place where St. Paul dwelt, which mentions a picture of the bleſſed Virgin. Una ex vii. ab Luca depictis, "being one of the ſeven painted by St. Luke."

St. Luke was a Jewiſh proſelyte; but at what time he became a Chriſtian is uncertain. Thoſe who underſtand him in the beginning of his goſpel, ſay, he had the facts from the reports of others, who were eye-witneſſes, and ſuppoſe him to have been converted by St. Paul; and that

he learned the hiſtory of his goſpel from the converſation of that apoſtle, and wrote it under his direction; and that when St. Paul, in one of his epiſtles, ſays, "according to my goſpel, he means this of St. Luke, which he ſtiled his, from the great ſhare he had in the compoſition of it.

On the other hand, thoſe who hold that he wrote his goſpel from his own perſonal knowledge, obſerve, that he could not receive it from St. Paul, as an eye witneſs of the matters contained in it, becauſe all thoſe matters were tranſacted before his converſion; and that he never ſaw our Lord before he appeared to him in his journey to Damaſcus, which was ſome time after he aſcended into heaven. Conſequently, when St. Paul ſays, "according to my goſpel," he means no more than that goſpel in general which he preached; the whole preaching of the apoſtles being ſtiled the goſpel.

But however this be, St. Luke became the inſeparable companion of St. Paul in all his travels, and his conſtant fellow-labourer in the work of the miniſtry. This endeared him to that apoſtle, who ſeems delighted with owning him for his fellow-labourer, and in calling him, "the beloved phyſician, and the "brother whoſe praiſe is in the goſpel."

St. Luke wrote two books for the uſe of the church, his goſpel and the acts of the apoſtles; both which he dedicated to Theophilus, which many of the ancients ſuppoſe to have been a feigned name, denoting a lover of God, a little common to all ſincere Chriſtians. But others think it was a real perſon, becauſe the title of "moſt excellent" is attributed to him; the uſual title and form of addreſs in thoſe times to princes and great men.

His goſpel contains the principal tranſactions of our Lord's life; and the particulars omitted by him, are, in general, of leſs importance than thoſe of the other evangeliſts.

With regard to the acts of the apoſtles, written by St. Luke, the work was, no doubt, performed at Rome, about the time of St. Paul's impriſonment there, with which he concludes his ſtory. It contains the actions, and ſometimes the ſufferings of the principal apoſtles, eſpecially St. Paul, whoſe activity in the cauſe of Chriſt made him bear a great part in the labours of his Maſter; and St. Luke being his conſtant attendant, an eye-witneſs of the

the whole carriage of his life, and privy to his moſt intimate tranſactions, was conſequently capable of giving a more full and ſatisfactory account of them. Among other things he numerates the great miracles the apoſtles did in confirmation of their doctrine.

In both theſe treatiſes his manner of writing is exact and accurate; his ſtile noble and elegant, ſublime and lofty, and yet clear and perſpicuous, flowing with an eaſy and natural grace and ſweetneſs, admirably adapted to an hiſtorical deſign. In ſhort, as an hiſtorian, he was faithful in his relations, and elegant in his writings; as a miniſter, careful and diligent for the good of ſouls; as a chriſtian, devout and pious; and to crown all the reſt, laid down his life in teſtimony of the goſpel he had both preached and publiſhed to the world.

Saint BARNABAS.

ST. Barnabas was at firſt called Joſes, a ſofter termination generally given by the Greeks to Joſeph. His fellow diſciples added the name of Barnabas, as ſignificant of ſome extraordinary property in him. St. Luke interprets it, "the ſon of conſolation," which he was ever ready to adminiſter to the afflicted, both by word or action.

He was a deſcendant of the tribe of Levi, of a family removed out of Judea, and ſettled in the iſle of Cyprus, where they had purchaſed an eſtate, as the Levites might do out of their country. His parents finding their ſon of a promiſing genius and diſpoſition, placed him in one of the ſchools of Jeruſalem, under the tuition of Gamaliel, St. Paul's maſter; an accident which, in all probability, laid the firſt foundation for that intimacy that afterwards ſubſiſted between theſe two eminent ſervants of the bleſſed Jeſus.

The firſt mention we find of St. Barnabas in the holy ſcripture is the record of that great and worthy ſervice he did the church of Chriſt, by ſuccouring it with the ſale of his patrimony in Cyprus, the whole price of which he laid at the apoſtles feet, to be put into the common ſtock, and diſpoſed of as they ſhould think fit among the indigent followers of the holy Jeſus. This worthy example was followed by thoſe who were bleſſed with the goods of fortune; none kept their plenty to them-

themſelves, but turned their houſes and land into money, and devoted it to the common uſe of the church. St. Barnabas is, indeed, mentioned as ſelling the moſt valuable eſtate on this occaſion; or being the moſt forward and ready to begin a common ſtock, and ſet others a laudable pattern of charity and benevolence.

And now St. Barnabas became conſiderable in the miniſtry and government of the church; for we find that St. Paul, coming to Jeruſalem three years after his converſion, and not readily procuring admittance into the church, becauſe he had been ſo grievous a perſecutor of it, and might ſtill be ſuſpected of a deſign to betray it, addreſſed himſelf to Barnabas, a leading man among the Chriſtians, and one that had perſonal knowledge of him. He accordingly introduced him to Peter and James, and ſatisfied them of the ſincerity of his converſion, and in what a miraculous manner it was brought about. This recommendation carried ſo much weight with it, that Paul was not only received into the communion of the apoſtles, but taken into Peter's houſe, "and abode with him fifteen days." 1 Gal. i. 18.

About four or five years after this, the agreeable news was brought to Jeruſalem, that ſeveral of their body who had been driven out of Judea, by the perſecutions raiſed about what St. Stephen had preached at Antioch with ſuch ſucceſs, that a great number both of Jews and proſelytes, embraced Chriſtianity; and were deſirous that ſome of the ſuperior order would come down and confirm them. This requeſt was immediately granted, and Barnabas was deputed to ſettle the new plantation. Being himſelf "a good man, and full of the Holy Ghoſt, and of faith," his charitable deeds accompanying his diſcourſes, and his very pious life exemplifying his ſound doctrine, the people were greatly influenced by him, and very large additions were made to the chriſtian church. But there being too large a field for one labourer, he went to fetch Saul from Tarſus, who came back with him to Antioch, and aſſiſted him a whole year in eſtabliſhing that church. Their labours proſpered; their aſſemblies were crouded, and the diſciples, who, before this, were called among themſelves, Brethren, Believers, Elect, and by their enemies, Nazarenes; and

and Galileans were now called Chriſtians firſt in Antioch.

When the apoſtles had fulfilled their charitable embaſſy, and ſtaid ſome time at Jeruſalem to ſee the good effect of it, they returned again to Antioch, bringing with them John whoſe ſirname was Mark, the ſon of Mary, ſiſter to Barnabas, and at whoſe houſe the diſciples found both ſecurity for their perſons, and conveniency for the ſolemnities of their worſhip. But ſoon after the apoſtles returned to Antioch, an expreſs relation was made to the church, by the mouth of one of the prophets who miniſtered there, that Barnabas and Saul ſhould be ſet apart for an extraordinary work, unto which the Holy Ghoſt had appointed them. Upon this declaration, the church ſet apart a day for a ſolemn miſſion; after devout prayer and faſting, they laid their hands upon them, and ordained them to their office; which was to travel over certain countries, and preach the goſpel to the Gentiles. From this joint commiſſion Barnabas obtained the name of an apoſtle, not only among latter writers of the church, but with St. Paul himſelf, and with St. Luke, in the hiſtory of the acts of the apoſtles.

Paul and Barnabas being thus conſecrated "the apoſtles of the Gentiles," entered upon their province, taking with them John Mark, for their miniſter or deacon, who aſſiſted them in many eccleſiaſtical offices, particularly in taking care of the poor.

The firſt city they viſited after their departure from Antioch, was Seleucia, a city of Syria adjoining to the Sea; from whence they ſailed for the iſland of Cyprus, the native place of St. Barnabas, and arrived at Salamis, a port formerly remarkable for its trade. Here they boldly preached the doctrines of the goſpel, in the ſynagogue of the Jews; and from thence travelled to Paphos, the capital of the Iſland, and famous for a temple dedicated to Venus, the titular goddeſs of Cyprus. Here their preaching was attended with remarkable ſucceſs; Servius Paulus, the pro-conſul, being, among others, converted to the chriſtian faith.

Leaving Cyprus, they croſſed the ſea to preach in Pamphylia, where their deacon John, to the great grief of his uncle Barnabas, left them, and returned to Jeruſalem; either tired with continual travels, or diſcouraged at the unavoidable dangers

and difficulties, which experience had ſufficiently informed him would conſtantly attend the preachers of the goſpel, from hardened Jews and idolatrous Gentiles.

Soon after their arrival at Lyſtra, Paul cured a man that had been lame from his mother's womb, which ſo aſtoniſhed the inhabitants, that they believed them to be gods, who had viſited the world in the form of men. Barnabas they treated as Jupiter, their ſovereign deity, either becauſe of his age, or the gravity and comelineſs of his perſon; for all the writers of antiquity repreſent him as a perſon of a venerable aſpect, and a majeſtic preſence. But the apoſtles, with the greateſt humility, declared themſelves to be but mortals: and the inconſtant populace ſoon ſatisfied themſelves of the truth of what they had aſſerted; for at the perſuaſion of their indefatigable perſecutors, who followed them hither alſo, they made an aſſault upon them, and ſtoned Paul, till they left him for dead. But, ſupported by an inviſible power from on high, he ſoon recovered his ſpirits and ſtrength, and the apoſtles immediately departed for Derbe. Soon after their arrival, they again applied themſelves to the work of the miniſtry, and converted many to the religion of the bleſſed Jeſus.

From Derbe they returned back to Lyſtra, Iconium, and Antioch, in Piſidia, "confirming the ſouls of the diſciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith; and that we muſt, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God." After a ſhort ſtay they again viſited the churches of Pamphilia, Perga, and Attalia, where they took ſhip, and ſailed to Antioch in Syria, the place from whence they firſt ſet out. Soon after their arrival, they called the church of this city together, and gave them an account of their travels, and the great ſucceſs with which their preaching in the Gentile world had been attended.

But they had not long continued in this city, before their aſſiſtance was required to compoſe a difference in this church, occaſioned by ſome of the Jewiſh converts, who endeavoured to perſuade the Gentiles, that they were bound to obſerve the law of Moſes, as well as that of Chriſt; and be circumciſed, as well as baptiſed. Barnabas endeavoured to perſuade the zealots from preſſing ſuch unneceſſary obſervances; but all his endeavours proving ineffectual, he was deputed, with St. Paul and

and others, to the church at Jeruſalem, to ſubmit the queſtion to be determined there in a full aſſembly. During their ſtay at Jeruſalem, Mark, in all probability, reconciled himſelf to his uncle Barnabas, and returned with him and St. Paul to Antioch, after they had ſucceeded in their buſineſs at Jeruſalem, and obtained a decree from the ſynod there, that the Gentile converts ſhould not have circumciſion and other Moſaic rites impoſed upon them.

This determination generally comforted and quieted the minds of the Gentiles, but it did not prevent the bigotted Jews from keeping up a ſeparation from them; and that with ſo much obſtinacy, that when St. Peter, ſome time after, came to Antioch, he, for fear of offending them, contradicted his former practice and late ſpeech and vote in the ſynod of Jeruſalem, by refraining from all kind of communion with the Gentiles: and Barnabas himſelf, though ſo great and good a man, was induced, by the authority of his example, to commit the ſame error: but, doubtleſs, on being reproved by St. Paul, they both took more courage, and walked according to the true liberty and freedom of the goſpel.

Some days after this laſt occurrence, Paul made a propoſal to Barnabas, that they ſhould repeat their late travels among the Gentiles, and ſee how the churches they had planted increaſed in their numbers, and improved in the doctrines they had taught them. Barnabas very readily complied with the motion; but deſired they might take with them his reconciled nephew, John Mark. This Paul abſolutely refuſed, becauſe, in their former voyage, Mark had not ſhewn the conſtancy of a faithful miniſter of Chriſt, but conſulted his own eaſe at a dangerous juncture; departed from them without leave at Pamphilia, and returned to Jeruſalem. Barnabas ſtill inſiſted on taking him; and the other continuing as reſolute to oppoſe it, a ſhort debate aroſe, which terminated in a rupture; whereby theſe two holy men, who had, for ſeveral years been companions in the miniſtry, and with united endeavours propagated the goſpel of the Son of God, now took different provinces. Barnabas, with his kinſman, ſailed to his own country, Cyprus; and Paul, accompanied with Silas, travelled to the churches of Syria and Cilicia.

After

After this ſeparation from St. Paul, the ſacred writings give us no account of St. Barnabas; nor are the eccleſiaſtical writers agreed among themſelves with regard to the actions of our apoſtle, after his ſailing for Cyprus. This, however, ſeems to be certain, that he did not ſpend the whole remainder of his life in that iſland, but viſited different parts of the world, preaching the glad tidings of the goſpel, healing the ſick, and working other miracles among the Gentiles. After long and painful travels attended with different degrees of ſucceſs in different places, he returned to Cyprus, his native country, where he ſuffered martyrdom in the following manner: Certain Jews coming from Syria and Salamis, where Barnabas was then preaching the goſpel, being highly exaſperated at his extraordinary ſucceſs, fell upon him as he was diſputing in the ſynagogue, dragged him out, and, after the moſt inhuman tortures, ſtoned him to death. His kinſman, John Mark, who was a ſpectator of this barbarous action, privately interred his body in a cave; where it remained till the time of the emperor Zeno, in the year of Chriſt 485, when it was diſcovered, with St. Matthew's goſpel in Hebrew, written with his own hand lying on his breaſt.

Saint STEPHEN.

BOTH the ſcriptures and ancient writers are ſilent with regard to the birth, country, and parents of St. Stephen. Epiphanius is of opinion, that he was one of the ſeventy diſciples: but this is very uncertain. Our bleſſed Saviour appointed his ſeventy diſciples to teach the doctrines, and preach the glad tidings of the goſpel; but it does not appear that St. Stephen and the ſix other firſt deacons, had any particular deſignation before they were choſen for the ſervice of the tables; and therefore St. Stephen could not have been one of our Lord's diſciples, though

though he might have often followed him, and liſtened to his diſcourſes.

He was remarkably zealous for the cauſe of religion, and full of the Holy Ghoſt: working many wonderful miracles, before the people, and preſſing them with the greateſt earneſtneſs, to embrace the doctrines of the goſpel.

This highly provoked the Jews; and ſome of the ſynagogue of the freed men of Cyrenia. Alexandria, and other places, entered into diſpute with him; but being unable to reſiſt the wiſdom and ſpirit by which he ſpake, they ſuborned falſe witneſſes againſt him, to teſtify that they heard him blaſpheme againſt Moſes and againſt God. Nor did they ſtop here; they ſtirred up the people by their calumnies: ſo that they dragged him before the council of the nation, or great Sanhedrim, where they produced falſe witneſſes againſt him, who depoſed, that they had heard him ſpeak againſt the temple and againſt the law, and affirm, that Jeſus of Nazareth would deſtroy the holy place, and aboliſh the law of Moſes. Stephen, ſupported by his own innocence, and an inviſible power from on high, appeared undaunted in the midſt of this aſſembly, and his countenance ſhone like that of an angel; when the high-prieſt aſking him what he had to offer againſt the accuſations laid to his charge, he anſwered in the following manner:

"Hearken unto me, ye deſcendants of Jacob; the Almighty whoſe glory is from everlaſting, appeared to our father Abraham, before he ſojourned in Charran, even while he dwelt in Meſopotamia, commanding him to leave his country and relations, and retire into a land which he would ſhew him.

"Abraham obeyed the divine mandate; he left the land of the Chaldeans and pitched his tent in Charran; from whence, after his father was dead, he removed into Canaan, even the land you now inhabit; but he gave him no inheritance in this country, not even ſo much as to ſet his foot upon. He promiſed, indeed, he would give it him for a poſſeſſion, which ſhould deſcend to his poſterity, though at this time he had no child.

"God alſo indicated to him that his ſeed ſhould ſojourn in a ſtrange land; the people of which ſhould make them bondmen, and treat them cruelly four hundred years. After which, he would judge that nation,

bring out his people who ſhould ſerve them in this place, as an earneſt of which, he gave him the covenant of circumciſion; and afterwards a ſon whom Abraham circumciſed the eighth day, calling his name Iſaac, who begat Jacob, and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.

" But theſe, moved with envy, ſold their brother Joſeph into Egypt, where the Almighty protected him, delivered him from all his afflictions, indued him with wiſdom, and gave him favour in the ſight of Pharaoh, the monarch of Egypt, who made him governor both of his houſe and kingdom.

" Soon after this exaltation of Joſeph, the countries of Egypt and Canaan were afflicted with a terrible famine, and our fathers found no ſuſtenance for either themſelves or flocks. But as ſoon as Jacob heard the welcome tidings, that there was corn in Egypt, he ſent our fathers thither purchaſe bread for the famine of houſhold. And in their ſecond his journey thither, Joſeph made himſelf known to his brethren, and alſo informed Pharaoh of his country and relations. After which, Joſeph's father, with his whole houſe, conſiſting of threeſcore and fifteen ſouls, went down into Egypt, where both Jacob and our fathers died, and were carried to Sychem, and depoſited in the ſepulchre, purchaſed by Abraham, of the ſon of Emmor, the father of Sychem.

" But as the time for fulfilling the promiſe made to Abraham approached, the people multiplied in Egypt, till another king aroſe, who was not acquainted with the merits of Joſeph, and the great things he had done for that country. This prince uſed our fathers with cruelty, and artfully attempted to deſtroy all the male children. At this time Moſes was born, and being exceeding fair, was nouriſhed three months in his father's houſe: but as it was dangerous to conceal him there any longer, he was hid among the flags, on the banks of the river; when the daughter of Pharaoh found him, and educated him as her own ſon.

" Thus Moſes became acquainted with all the learning of Egypt, and was mighty both in word and deed: but when he was forty years old, he thought proper to viſit his brethren, the children of Iſrael; and ſeeing an Egyptian ſmiting an Hebrew, he aſſiſted the ſuffering perſon, and ſlew the Egyptian; ſuppoſing that his brethren would have been perſuaded that from his hand, with

with the aſſiſtance of the Almighty, they might expect deliverance; but they conceived no hopes of this kind.

"The next day he again viſited them, and ſeeing two of them ſtriving together, he endeavoured to make them friends: Ye are brethren ſaid he to them, why do ye injure one another? But he who did his neighbour wrong, inſtead of liſtening to his advice, thruſt him away, ſaying, By what authority art thou a judge of our actions? wilt thou kill me, as thou didſt the Egyptian, yeſterday?

"Moſes, at this anſwer, fled from Egypt, and ſojourned in the land of Media, where he begat two ſons. At the end of forty years, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in the wilderneſs of Mount Sinai, out of the middle of a buſh, burning with fire: a ſight which ſurpriſed Moſes; and as he drew near to view more attentively ſo uncommon a ſight, God called unto him ſaying, 'I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Iſaac, and the God of Jacob.' At which, Moſes trembled, and turned aſide his face. But the Lord ſaid to him, 'put off thy ſhoes from thy feet, for the place where thou ſtandeſt is holy ground. I have long ſeen the afflictions of my people which are in Egypt; I have heard their cries, and am now deſcended from heaven to deliver them. Come, therefore, I will ſend thee into Egypt.'

"Thus was that Moſes whom they refuſed, ſent by God to be ruler, and delivered by the hand of the angel, who appeared to him in the buſh. Accordingly, he brought them out after he had ſhewed ſigns and wonders in the land of Egypt, in the Red Sea, and in the wilderneſs, forty years. It is this Moſes that told our fathers, 'A prophet ſhall the Lord your God raiſe up unto you, and your brethren, like unto me. Him ſhall ye hear.'

"And this prophet is the ſame who was in the church in the wilderneſs, with the angel which ſpake unto Moſes, in Mount Sinai, and with our fathers: the ſame who received the lively oracles to give unto us: he whom our fathers would not obey, but thruſt him from them, and were deſirous of returning to their ſtate of bondage; commanding Aaron to make them gods to go before them; and pretending that they knew not what was become of Moſes, who delivered them from the ſlavery of Egypt. They now made

made a calf, offered ſacrifices to it, and rejoiced in the work of their own hands. On which the Almighty abandoned them to worſhip the hoſt of heaven, as the prophets have recorded. 'O ye houſes of Iſrael! have you offered unto me ſlain beaſts and ſacrifices, by the ſpace of forty years in the wilderneſs? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the ſtar of your god Remphan; figures which ye made to worſhip them: I will carry you away beyond Babylon.'

"Our fathers were poſſeſſed of the tabernacle of witneſs in the wilderneſs; being made according to the pattern Moſes had ſeen in the Mount. This tabernacle our fathers brought in with Jeſus into the poſſeſſion of the Gentiles, who were driven out by the Almighty, till the days of David, a favourite of the Moſt High, and who was deſirous of finding a tabernacle for the God of Jacob; but Solomon built him an houſe.

"We muſt not, however, think, that the Almighty will reſide in temples made with hands, as the prophet beautifully obſerved, 'Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footſtool: what houſe will ye build me, ſaith the Lord, or where is the place of my reſt? Hath not mine hand made all theſe things?

"Ye ſtiff-necked, ye uncircumciſed in heart and ears, ye will for ever reſiſt the Holy Ghoſt. Ye tread in the paths of your fathers; as they did, ſo do you ſtill continue to do. Did not your fathers perſecute every one of the prophets? did not they ſlay them who ſhewed the coming of the Holy One, whom ye yourſelves have betrayed and murdered? Ye have received the law by the depoſition of angels, but never kept it."

At theſe words they were ſo highly enraged, that they all gnaſhed their teeth againſt him. But Stephen lifting up his eyes to heaven, ſaw the glory of God, and Jeſus ſtanding at the right hand of Omnipotence. Upon which, he ſaid to the council. "I ſee the heavens open, and the ſon of man ſtanding at the right hand of God." This ſo greatly provoked the Jews, that they cried out with one voice, and ſtopped their ears, as if they had heard ſome dreadful blaſphemy: and falling upon him, they dragged him out of the city, and ſtoned him to death. It was the cuſtom of the Jews, on theſe occaſions, for the witneſſes to throw the firſt ſtone. Whe-

Whether they obſerved this particular at the martyrdom of Stephen is uncertain; but the evangeliſt tells us, that the witneſſes were principally concerned in this action; for they ſtripped off their cloaths, and laid them at the feet of a young man whoſe name was Saul, then a violent perſecutor of the chriſtian church, but afterwards one of the moſt zealous preachers of the goſpel.

Stephen, while they were mangling his body with ſtones, was praying to Omnipotence for their pardon. "Lord, ſaid he, lay not this ſin to their charge." And then calling on his dear Redeemer to receive his ſpirit, he yielded up his ſoul.

TIMOTHY.

TIMOTHY was born a convert and diſciple of St Paul. He was born, according to ſome, at Lyſtra; or, according to others, at Derbe. His father was a Gentile, but his mother a Jeweſs, whoſe name was Eunice, and that of his grandmother Lais.

Theſe particulars are taken notice of becauſe St. Paul commends their piety and the good education which they had given Timothy. When St. Paul came to Derbe and Lyſtra, about the year of Chriſt 51 or 52, the brethren gave a very advantageous teſtimony of the merit and good diſpoſitions of Timothy: and the apoſtle would have him along with him, but he circumciſed him, at Lyſtra before he received him into his company. Timothy applied himſelf to labour with St. Paul in the buſineſs of the goſpel; and did him very important ſervices, through the whole courſe of his preaching. It is not known when he was made a biſhop; but it is believed that he received very early the impoſition of the apoſtle's hands; and that in conſequence of a particular revelation, or order from the Holy Ghoſt. St. Paul calls him not only his dearly beloved ſon, but alſo his brother, the companion of his labours, and a man of God. He declared that there were no more united with him

in heart and mind, than Timothy.

This holy disciple accompanied St. Paul to Macedonia, to Philippi, to Thessalonica, to Berea; and when the apostle went from Berea, he left Timothy and Silas there to confirm the converts. When he came to Athens, he sent for Timothy to come thither to him; and when he was come, and had given him an account of the churches of Macedonia, St. Paul sent him back to Thessalonica, from whence he afterwards returned with Silas, and came to St. Paul at Corinth. There he continued with him, and the apostle mentions him with Silas, at the beginning of the two epistles which he then wrote to the Thessalonians,

Some years after this, St. Paul sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia; and gave Timothy orders to call at Corinth, to refresh the minds of the Corinthians, with regard to the truths which he had inculcated in them. Some time after, writing to the same Corinthians, he recommends them to take care of Timothy, and send him back in peace; after which Timothy returned to St. Paul into Asia, who there stayed for him. They went together into Macedonia: and the apostle put Timothy's name with his own, before the second epistle to the Corinthians, which he wrote to them from Macedonia, about the middle of the year of Christ 57. And he sent his recommendations to the Romans in the letter which he wrote them from Corinth the same year.

When St. Paul returned from Rome, in 64, he left Timothy at Ephesus to take care of that church of which he was the first bishop, as he is recognized by the council of Chalcedon. St. Paul wrotc to him from Macedonia the first of the two letters which are addressed to him. He recommends him to be more moderate in his austerities, and to drink a little wine, because of the weakness of his stomach, and his frequent infirmities. After the apostle came to Rome in the year 65, being now very near his death, he wrote to him his second letter, which is full of the marks of his kindness and tenderness for this his dear disciple; and which is justly looked upon as the last will of St. Paul. He desires him to come to Rome to him before winter, and bring with him several things which St. Paul had left at Troas. If Timothy went to Rome, as it is probable he did, he must be

be a witneſs there of the martyrdom of this apoſtle, in the year of Chriſt 66.

If he did not die before the year 97, we can hardly doubt but that he muſt be the angel of the church of Epheſus, to whom St. John writes in his Revelations: though the reproaches which the Holy Ghoſt make to him, &c. of having left his firſt love, do not ſeem to agree to ſo holy a man as Timothy was. Thus he ſpeaks to him: "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canſt not bear them which are evil: and thou haſt tried them which ſay they are apoſtles, and are not, and haſt found them liars. And haſt borne, and haſt patience, and for my name's ſake haſt laboured and haſt not fainted. Nevertheleſs, I have ſomewhat againſt thee; becauſe thou haſt left thy firſt love. Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen: and repent and do thy firſt works, or elſe I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candleſtick out of this place, except thou repent." The greateſt part of interpreters think, that theſe reproaches do not ſo much concern the perſon of Timothy, as that of ſome members of his church, whoſe zeal was grown cool. But others are perſuaded that they may be applied to Timothy himſelf, who made ample amends by the martyrdom which he ſuffered, for what the Holy Ghoſt reproaches him with, in this place. It is ſuppoſed that Timothy had Oneſimus for his ſucceſſor.

Saint TITUS.

TITUS was a Gentile by religion and birth, but converted by St Paul, who calls him his ſon. St. Jerom ſays, that he was St. Paul's interpreter; and that, probably, becauſe he might write what St. Paul dictated, or explained in Latin what this apoſtle ſaid in Greek; or rendered into Greek what St. Paul ſaid in Hebrew or Syriac. St. Paul took him with him to Jeruſalem, when he went thither in the year 51, of the

the vulgar æra, about deciding the queſtion which was then ſtarted, whether the converted Gentiles ought to be made ſubject to the ceremonies of the law? Some would then have obliged him to circumciſe Titus; but neither he nor Titus would conſent to it. Titus was ſent by the ſame apoſtle to Corinth, upon occaſion of ſome diſputes which then divided the church. He was very well received by the Corinthians, and very much ſatisfied with their ready compliance: but would receive nothing from them, intimating thereby the diſintereſtedneſs of his maſter.

From hence he went to St. Paul into Macedonia, and gave him an account of the ſtate of the church at Corinth. A little while after the apoſtle deſired him to return again to Corinth, to ſet things in order preparatory to his coming. Titus readily undertook this journey, and departed immediately, carrying with him St. Paul's ſecond letter to the Corinthians. Titus was made biſhop of the iſle of Crete, about the 63d year of Chriſt, when St. Paul was obliged to quit this iſland, in order to take care of the other churches. The following year he wrote to him to deſire, that as ſoon as he ſhould have ſent Tychicus or Artemas to him for ſupplying his place in Crete, Titus would come to him to Nicopolis in Macedonia, or to Nicopolis, in Epirus, upon the gulph of Ambracia, where the apoſtle intended to paſs his winter.

The ſubject of this epiſtle is to repreſent to Titus what are the qualities that a biſhop ſhould be endued with. As the principal function which Titus was to exerciſe in the iſle of Crete, was to ordain prieſts and biſhops, it was highly incumbent on him to make a diſcreet choice. The apoſtle alſo gives him a ſketch of the advice and inſtructions which he was to propound to all ſorts of perſons: to the aged, both men and women; to young people of each ſex; to ſlaves or ſervants. He exhorts him to keep a ſtrict authority over the Cretans; and to reprove them with ſeverity, as being a people addicted to lying, wickedneſs, idleneſs, and gluttony. And as many converted Jews were in the churches of Crete, he exhorts Titus to oppoſe their vain traditions, and Jewiſh fables: and at the ſame time to ſhew them that the obſervation of the legal ceremonies is no longer neceſſary; that the diſtinction of meat is now aboliſhed; and that every

every thing is pure and clean to thoſe that are ſo themſelves: he puts him in mind of exhorting the faithful to be obedient to temporal power; to avoid diſputes, quarrels, and ſlander; to apply themſelves to honeſt callings; and to ſhun the company of an heretic, after the firſt and ſecond admonition.

The epiſtle to Titus has always been acknowledged by the church. The Marcionites did not receive it, nor did the Baſilidians, and ſome other heretics; but Tatian, the head of the Encraties, received it, and preferred it before all the reſt. It is not certainly known from what place it was written, nor by whom it was ſent.

Titus was deputed to preach the goſpel in Dalmatia; and he was ſtill there in the year 65, when the apoſtle Paul wrote his ſecond epiſtle to Timothy. He afterwards returned into Crete; from which it is ſaid, he propagated the goſpel in the neighbouring iſlands. He died at the age of 94, and was buried in Crete. We are aſſured that the cathedral of the city of Candia is dedicated to his name; and it is ſaid that his head is preſerved there intire. The Greeks keep his feſtival on the 25th of Auguſt, and the Latins on the 4th of January.

The VIRGIN MARY.

AS we are taught by the predictions of the prophets, that a virgin was to be the mother of the promiſed Meſſiah, ſo we are aſſured by the unanimous concurrence of the Evangeliſts, that this virgin's name was Mary, the daughter of Joachim and Anna, of the tribe of Judah; and married to Joſeph, of the ſame tribe. The ſcripture, indeed, tells no more of the bleſſed virgin's parents, than that ſhe was of the family of David, and of the town of Bethlehem.

All that is ſaid concerning the birth of Mary and her parents is to

be found only in ſome apocryphal writings; but which, however, are very ancient. St. John ſays, that Mary the wife of Cleophas, who was the mother of thoſe whom the goſpel ſtile our Lord's brethren, was the virgin's ſiſter Mary that was of the royal race of David. She was allied likewiſe to the family of Aaron, ſince Elizabeth the wife of Zacharias, and mother of John the baptiſt, was her couſin.

Not to build upon uncertainties, thus much we are aſſured by the teſtimony of an angel, that ſhe was happy above all other women, in the divine favour; that ſhe was full of grace; and that the Lord was with her in a peculiar manner.

For ſince the Son of God, in order to become a man, and to dwell among us, was obliged to take a human body from ſome woman, it was agreeable to his infinite wiſdom that he ſhould chuſe for this purpoſe one whoſe endowments of body and mind were moſt holy and pious; who excelled the reſt of her ſex in chaſte and virtuous diſpoſitions: and who, in ſhort, was a repoſitory of all the divine grace.

The exceſſes of that devotion which has been paid to the bleſſed virgin, and the legendary tales and lying viſions of Monks, cannot in reaſon blemiſh her real excellencies, no more than the idolatries of the Pagans can obſcure the light of the ſun which is deified. After all the abuſes of ſuperſtition or profaneneſs, the extremes of honour and diſhonour, there will ever be a very high eſteem and veneration due to the mother of the bleſſed Jeſus.

That the mother of our Lord, notwithſtanding her marriage, was even in that ſtate to remain a pure virgin, and to conceive Chriſt in a miraculous manner, is the clear doctrine of the Holy Scriptures. *Behold*, ſays Iſaiah, in chap. vii. prophecying of this myſterious incarnation, *a virgin ſhall conceive and bear a ſon*. The Hebrew word Almah moſt properly ſignifies a virgin; and ſo it is tranſlated here by all the ancient interpreters; and never once uſed in the ſcripture in any other ſenſe, as ſeveral learned men have proved againſt the pretenſions particularly of the modern Jews. It primarily ſignifies *hid*, or *concealed*; whence it is uſed to denote a virgin, becauſe of the cuſtom in the eaſtern countries of keeping ſuch concealed from the view of men, never ſuffering them to ſtir out of the women's apartments.

Though

Though we cannot doubt but that God, who ordained this myſtery, provided for all circumſtances requiſite to its accompliſhment; yet we may conſider which way a decorum was preſerved in this caſe by marriage. St. Matthew ſays, "The virgin was eſpouſed to Joſeph; and that before they came together ſhe was found to be with child of the Holy Ghoſt." Whence we may conclude that it was not a conſtant cuſtom for the bride to go and live at the bridegroom's houſe immediately upon her being affianced to him.

Notwithſtanding the various circumſtances relating to this affair, as told us in apocryphal books, are not to be relied on as certain; yet, however, Mary's reſolution of continency, even in a married ſtate, cannot be called in queſtion, ſince her virginity is atteſted by the goſpel; and that herſelf, ſpeaking to the angel, who declared to her that ſhe ſhould become the mother of a ſon, told him, "That ſhe knew not a man," or that ſhe lived in continency with her huſband. For which reaſon, when Joſeph perceived her pregnancy, he was at firſt ſo extremely ſurprized and ſcandalized at it, that he reſolved to put her away, but ſecretly, without making any noiſe, and without obſerving the common formalities: for he knew the mutual reſolution they had agreed to, of being in continence, though in a ſtate of marriage.

The Virgin Mary then being eſpouſed, or married to Joſeph, the angel Gabriel appeared to her, in order to acquaint her, that ſhe ſhould become the mother of the Meſſiah. Mary aſked him how that could be, ſince ſhe knew no man? To which the angel replied, that the Holy Ghoſt ſhould come upon her, and the power of the higheſt ſhould overſhadow her: ſo that ſhe ſhould conceive without the concurrence of any man. And to confirm what he had ſaid to her, and ſhew that nothing is impoſſible to God, he added, that her couſin Elizabeth, who was both old and barren, was then in the ſixth month of her pregnancy. Mary anſwered him, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word." And by the miraculous operation of the Holy Ghoſt, ſhe preſently conceived the Son of God; the true Emmanuel, that is to ſay, *God with us*. Whether the Holy Virgin, immediately after the annunciation, went up to the paſſover at Jeruſalem (as ſome

ſome have imagined, this being the ſeaſon of the year for it) or not, we have no account from the evangeliſt St. Luke; but this he aſſures us, that a little while after ſhe ſet out for Hebron, a city in the mountains of Judah, in order to viſit her couſin Elizabeth, to congratulate her upon her pregnancy, which ſhe had learned from the angel, at an age when ſuch a bleſſing was not uſually to be expected. And no ſooner had ſhe entered the houſe and began to ſpeak, than upon Elizabeth's hearing the voice of Mary's ſalutation, her child, young John the Baptiſt, tranſported with ſupernatural emotions of joy, leaped in her womb. Whereupon ſhe was filled with the Holy Ghoſt; and being, by divine inſpiration, acquainted with the myſtery of the incarnation, ſhe re-ſaluted Mary, and cried out, "Bleſſed art thou amongſt women; and bleſſed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord ſhould come to me? For lo, as ſoon as the voice of thy ſalutation ſounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And bleſſed is ſhe that believed, for there ſhall be a performance of thoſe things which were told her from the Lord." Then Mary, filled with acknowledgments, and ſupernatural light, praiſed God, ſaying, "*My ſoul doth magnify the Lord, and my ſpirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour*," &c. as we find it in the hymn called Magnificat.

After Mary had continued here about three months, till Elizabeth was delivered, as St. Ambroſe thinks, that ſhe might ſee him on whoſe account ſhe principally made that viſit, ſhe then returned to her own houſe at Nazareth.

When ſhe was ready to be delivered, an edict was publiſhed by Cæſar Auguſtus, in the year of the world 4000, the firſt of Chriſt, and the third before the vulgar æra, which decreed, that all the ſubjects of the Roman empire ſhould go to their reſpective cities and places; there to have their names regiſtered according to their families. Thus Joſeph and Mary, who were both of the lineage of David, repaired to the city of Bethlehem, the original and native place of their family. But while they were in this city, the time being fulfilled in which Mary was to be delivered, ſhe brought forth her firſt-born ſon, wrapped him in ſwaddling-cloaths, and laid him in a manger of the ſtable

ſtable or cavern whither they had retired; for they could find no place in the public inn, becauſe of the great concourſe of people that were then at Bethlehem on the ſame occaſion: for they were forced to withdraw into the ſtable of the inn, not being able to get a more convenient place for her to be delivered.

The Greek fathers generally agree that the place of Chriſt's birth was a cavern. Juſtin and Euſebius place it out of the city, but in the neighbourhood; and St. Jerom ſays, it was at the extremity of the city, towards the ſouth. It was commonly believed that the virgin brought forth Jeſus the night after her arrival at Bethlehem, or on the 25th of December. Such is the ancient tradition of the church. The fathers inform us that Mary brought forth Jeſus Chriſt without pain, and without the aſſiſtance of any midwife: becauſe ſhe had conceived him without concupiſcence; and that neither he nor the fruit ſhe brought forth had any ſhare in the curſe pronounced againſt Adam and Eve.

At the ſame time the angels made the birth of Chriſt known to the ſhepherds who were in the fields near Bethlehem; and who came in the night to ſee Mary and Joſeph and the child lying in the manger, in order to pay him their tribute of adoration. Mary took notice of all theſe things and laid them up in her heart. Some time after came the Magi, or wiſe-men, from the eaſt, and brought to Jeſus the myſterious preſents of gold, frankincenſe, and myrrh, having been directed thither by a ſtar which led the way before them, to the very houſe where the babe lay. After this, being warned by an angel that appeared to them in a dream, they returned into their own country, by a way different from that by which they came, without giving Herod the intelligence he wanted; which he pretended was in order to come and worſhip the babe, though his real deſign was to cut him off, from a jealouſy of his rivalling him in his kingdom.

But the time of Mary's purification being come, that is, forty days after the birth of Jeſus, ſhe went to Jeruſalem in order to preſent her ſon in the temple; and there to offer the ſacrifice appointed by the law, for the purification of women after child-birth. At that time there was at Jeruſalem an old man named Simeon, who was full of the Holy

Ghoſt, and had received a ſecret aſſurance that he ſhould not die before he had ſeen Chriſt the Lord. Accordingly, he came into the temple by the impulſe of the ſpirit of God, and taking the little Jeſus in his arms, he bleſſed the Lord; and then addreſſing himſelf to Mary, ſaid, "This child is ſent for the riſing and falling of many in Iſrael; and for a ſign which ſhall be ſpoken againſt you; even ſo far as that thy own ſoul ſhall be pierced as with a ſword, that the ſecret thoughts in the hearts of many may be diſcovered."

Afterwards, when Joſeph and Mary were preparing to return to their own country of Nazareth, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joſeph in a dream, bidding him to retire into Egypt with Mary, and the child, becauſe Herod had a deſign to deſtroy Jeſus. Joſeph obeyed the admonition, and continued in Egypt till after the death of Herod; when both he and Mary returned to Nazareth, not daring to go to Bethlehem, becauſe it was in the juriſdiction of Archelaus, the ſon and ſucceſſor of Herod the Great.

Joſeph and Mary went every year to Jeruſalem to the feaſt of the paſſover: and when Jeſus was twelve years of age, they brought him with them to the capital. When the days of the feſtivals were ended, they ſet out on their return home: but the child Jeſus continued at Jeruſalem, without their perceiving it; and thinking that he might be with ſome of the company, they went on a day's journey; when not finding him among their acquaintance, they returned to Jeruſalem, ſeeking for him. Three days after, they found him in the temple, ſitting among the doctors, hearing them, and aſking them queſtions. When they ſaw him they were filled with aſtoniſhment: and Mary ſaid to him, My ſon, why have you ſerved us thus? Behold your father and myſelf, who have ſought you in great affliction. Jeſus anſwered them, Why did you ſeek me? Did not you not know that I muſt be employed about my father's buſineſs? Afterwards he returned with them to Nazareth, and lived in filial ſubmiſſion to them; but his mother laid up all theſe things in her heart. The goſpel ſays nothing more of the Virgin Mary, till the marriage at Cana of Galilee, where ſhe was preſent with her ſon Jeſus.

In the thirty-third year of Jeſus Chriſt, and thirtieth of the vulgar æra,

æra, our Saviour reſolved to manifeſt himſelf to the world, and therefore went to the baptiſm of St. John, from thence into the wilderneſs, and thence to the above-mentioned wedding, to which he, with his mother and diſciples, had been invited. At this entertainment, the proviſion of wine being ſomewhat ſcanty (probably becauſe the friends of the married couple were but mean) Chriſt's mother told her ſon, they had no wine, not doubting of his power to ſupply them: to which Jeſus anſwered in terms which had ſome appearance of a rebuke, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come." St. Chryſoſtom, and the followers of him in his explications, impute what was ſaid by the Holy Virgin to ſome motive of vanity, and that ſhe was tempted by a deſire of ſeeing her own credit raiſed by the miracles of her ſon; but the other fathers and commentators aſcribe it to her charity and compaſſion towards theſe poor people. And it is thought that Chriſt's anſwer was intended for more general uſe than the preſent occaſion; namely, to teach us to wait God's time of doing his own works; and certainly our Lord deſigned no affront to his mother to whom he always paid a pious and filial reverence. This anſwer is imputed by the ſaid fathers and commentators to Jeſus, not as a man; but as a miniſter of God. In this reſpect he ſays to Mary, what have I to do with thee? I know when I ought to ſhew forth my power; nor does it belong to you to appoint me the time of working miracles; ſince the proper time for this has not yet begun; and further intimating, that when it did, theſe were not to be wrought out of any private, partial, and civil views, but in purſuance of that great end, which he had in charge, the converſion and ſalvation of mankind. And ſo his mother underſtood him, receiving the anſwer with meekneſs, and charging the ſervants to attend him, and do whatever he commanded them.

There being in the room ſix great ſtone pitchers, Jeſus ordered them to be filled brim full of water; and afterwards commanded the ſervants to fill out and carry it to the maſter of the feaſt, who on taſting it, found it was excellent wine. And this is the firſt miracle Jeſus wrought at the beginning of his public miniſtry.

From hence our Lord went to Capernaum with his mother and brethren; that is, with his relations and

disciples, in order, as St. Chrysostom thinks, to fix the Virgin Mary in a settled habitation, while he travelled about the country in the exercise of his ministry; and this, indeed, seems to be the place where the Holy Virgin afterwards principally resided. St. Epiphanius, on the contrary, believed that she followed him every where; during the whole time of his preaching; though we do not find that the evangelists make any mention of her when they spake of several holy women of Galilee who followed him and ministered to his necessities.

We learn, from the third chapter of St. Mark, that on a certain day in the year of Christ 34, and vulgar æra 31, that as Jesus Christ was teaching in a house at Capernaum, so great a croud of people stood about him, that neither he nor his disciples had time to take any refreshment, which caused a report to be spread abroad, that he had fainted away, or fallen into a swoon: thus Grotius interprets the word *exeste*. The Greek term might insinuate that he was become mad, or had lost his understanding; and the vulgate reads it *desibant enim quoniam in furorem versus est*, which our translators have rendered, "They say he was besides himself." The mother of Jesus and his brethren, as it was natural for them, upon hearing such a report, came instantly to seek him, and endeavoured to take him out of the crowd, in order to give him all the relief in their power. It was not the people, without doubt, who made so wrong a judgment of Jesus, but the ignorant multitude, or the Pharisees, who said in the same place, that he was possessed of the devil.

The Virgin, and the brethren or relations of Jesus, came therefore to see what had given occasion to this report. And when they could not get into the house for the throngs of the people, they caused a message to be conveyed from one to another, till it was told Jesus, "That his mother and his brethren were at the door, and desired to speak with him." Jesus being accordingly informed of their coming, and that they waited to speak with him, being at that instant engaged in the word of his ministry, preaching the word of God, he made this reply: Who is my mother, and who are my brethren? and looking upon those that were round about him, he said, These are my mother and brethren; declaring, That whosoever did the will

will of his heavenly father, the ſame was his mother, and ſiſter and brother." This was what Chriſt had taught in another place, that we muſt prefer God to all human relations, and give the preference to his ſervice. But this ſaying could not reflect upon his mother, who was among the principal of thoſe who did the will of his heavenly father. Immediately upon her approach, a woman of the company ſaid with a loud voice, directing her words to Jeſus: "Bleſſed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou haſt ſucked." To which he replied, "Yea rather, bleſſed are they that hear the word of God and keep it." Not intimating hereby, that ſhe who had the honour to bear him did not deſerve to be called bleſſed throughout all generations; but that even her happineſs conſiſted more in doing the will of Chriſt, than in giving him a human body.

From this time we have no further account of the Holy Virgin, till we find her in Jeruſalem at the laſt paſſover our Saviour celebrated there; which was in the thirty-ſixth year of Chriſt, and thirty-third of the vulgar æra. In this city ſhe ſaw all that was tranſacted againſt him, followed him to Mount Calvary, and ſtayed at the foot of the croſs during the paſſion of her bleſſed Son. We cannot doubt but her ſoul was at this time pierced through, as old Simeon had propheſied, with the moſt acute pains, for the death of ſuch a Son. Yet her conſtancy was remarkable; for when the apoſtles were all frightened away from their maſter, ſhe, with a courage undaunted and worthy of the mother of Jeſus, continued even in the midſt of the executioners, being prepared to die with her ſon.

On this melancholy occaſion we cannot but ſuppoſe the Holy Virgin to have been affected with ſentiments fit for one who had ſo miraculouſly conceived, and ſo carefully obſerved and laid up in her mind all occurrences that related to the Son of God.

Jeſus Chriſt, who came to ſet us a pattern of all virtue, through the whole courſe of his life, was pleaſed, in theſe laſt moments, to teach us, that in what circumſtances ſoever we are, we muſt never caſt off that love and care which God's law obliges us to have for thoſe who gave us life. Being now ready to leave the world, and ſeeing his own mother at the foot of the croſs, and his beloved diſciple near her, he be-

queathed her to him by his laſt will and teſtament, ſaying to his mother, "Woman, behold thy ſon." And to the diſciple, "Behold thy mother;" and from that hour the diſciple took her home to his own houſe.

It is not to be doubted but that our Saviour appeared to his holy mother immediately after his reſurrection, and that ſhe was the firſt, or at leaſt one of the firſt, to whom he vouchſafed this great conſolation.

St. Luke acquaints us, in the firſt chapter of the Acts, that the Virgin Mary was with the apoſtles and others at his aſcenſion, and continued with them when aſſembled at Jeruſalem after his aſcenſion, waiting for the deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt; and it is probable that from her they learned the whole hiſtory of our Lord's private life before his baptiſm; though St. Chryſoſtom will have them to be taught it by revelation. After this ſhe dwelt in the houſe of St. John the evangeliſt, who took care of her as of his own mother. It is thought that he took her along with him to Epheſus, where he died in an extreme old age: and there is a letter of the œcumenical council of Epheſus, importing, that in the fifth century it was believed ſhe was buried there.

Yet this opinion was not ſo univerſally received, but that ſome authors of the ſame age think the Virgin Mary died and was buried at Jeruſalem: or rather in her ſepulchre at Gethſemane, near that city, where to this day it is ſhewn in a magnificent church dedicated to her name.

Epiphanius, the moſt learned father of the fourth century, declares he could not tell whether ſhe died a natural death, or by martyrdom: or whether ſhe remained immortal; or whether ſhe was buried or not. "None (ſays he) knows any thing of her deceaſe: but that it was glorious cannot be doubted. That body which was perfectly chaſte and pure enjoys a happineſs worthy of her, through whom the ſon of righteouſneſs aroſe and ſhone upon the world."

A learned writer has added to the before-cited paſſage of the council of Epheſus, another remark from their act; "That the cathedral church of Epheſus was dedicated under the name of the Virgin Mary; and that we find no other church of her name at that time in any approved author." For though the Holy Virgin was held in great veneration,

ration, yet it was not the cuſtom of the firſt ages to give the name of any ſaint to a church, except they had ſome of the relics, or built it in the place where ſuch a ſaint was martyred; or for ſome reaſon of the like nature.

The ſentiments of the Roman church are, that ſhe is dead; but they are divided as to her riſing again: or whether ſhe ſtays for the general reſurrection at Epheſus, Jeruſalem, or any other place.

With regard to the age at which ſhe died, and the preciſe year of her death, it is needleſs to trouble ourſelves about this enquiry; ſince nothing can be ſaid on theſe matters but what is very doubtful: and they cannot be fixed but at random. Nicephorus Calliſtus, and thoſe who have followed him, give no proof of what they advance on this ſubject, and therefore deſerve no credit. Nor ſhall we build upon the deſcription of the Holy Virgin given us by the ſame author, who ſays, that ſhe was of a moderate ſtature; or, according to ſome, a little below the ordinary ſtature of women: that her complexion was of the colour of wheat, her hair fair, her eyes lively, the eye-balls yellowiſh, or olive-coloured, her eye-brows black and ſemi-circular, her noſe pretty long, her lips red, her hands and fingers large, her air grave, ſimple and modeſt, her cloaths neat, without any pride or oſtentation, and of the natural colour of the wool. It has been pretended that St. Luke had drawn her picture; and in ſeveral places are ſhewn pictures of her, which, it is affirmed, are copies from the original by St. Luke.

The above-mentioned Nicephorus Calliſtus, an author of the 14th century, is the firſt who has ſpoken of this in a poſitive manner; but Theodorus, lecturer of the church of Conſtantinople, who lived in the ſixth century, ſays, that Eudocia ſent from Jeruſalem to Conſtantinople to the empreſs Pulcheria, a picture of the Holy Virgin, painted by St. Luke. But we need be in no great pain about this, ſince the true images of ſaints are the ideas of their virtues, which we ſhould form in our minds, and expreſs by our actions.

Certain it is that this holy evangeliſt has acquainted us with ſome particulars of the life of the Holy Virgin that could hardly be learned from any one but himſelf; which may incline us to believe that he had the happineſs of her acquaintance,

ance, and a tolerable ſhare of her confidence.

With regard to her character, we ſhall only mention in general, that common remark which the evangeliſts make, that ſhe was more diſpoſed to think than to ſpeak; and obſerved the extraordinary things which were ſaid of her ſon with ſilence; or, as they expreſs it, "She pondered them in her heart."

There are ſhewn ſome letters of the Virgin Mary to St. Ignatius the martyr, and from St. Ignatius to the Virgin. St. Bernard believed them to be genuine; but now no one doubts that they are ſpurious.

The ſame judgment is formed about the pretended letters of the Virgin to the people of Meſſina, and to thoſe of Florence; which they pretend ſhe wrote from Jeruſalem in Hebrew, but were tranſlated by St. Paul into Greek; at leaſt that to the Meſſinians, and which Conſtantine Laſcaris turned into Latin.

The viſions and revelation which ſome Romiſh monks pretend to have had of the bleſſed Virgin, ſufficiently deſtroy themſelves, as being not only abſurd and ridiculous, but inconſiſtent with her humour and ſanctity; but we cannot from hence abſolutely conclude that ſhe never appeared to any holy perſons, and as ſome of the fathers of the church give an account of ſuch apparitions, we ſhall ſelect the following.

St. Gregory Nyſſen reports of Gregory Thaumaturgus, that he being made biſhop of Neo Cæſaria in Pontus, and very ſolicitous concerning the doctrine which he ſhould preach to his people, the Bleſſed Virgin appeared to him in a form more glorious than any thing upon earth, with St. John the apoſtle in her company, to whom ſhe recommended the inſtructing of Gregory in the myſteries of the Chriſtian religion. Upon this the apoſtle dictated to him a ſhort confeſſion of faith, which Gregory forthwith committed to writing. This was preſerved afterwards with the greateſt care: and Gregory Nyſſen aſſures us, that it became the ſtanding creed of Neo Cæſaria; and kept that church clear from corruption, whilſt all other places were infected.

Gregory Nazianzen likewiſe gives us the following relation: That St. Juſtina the virgin, who ſuffered martyrdom under Diocleſian, ſeeing herſelf attacked by the magic arts, which Cyprian employed againſt her, had recourſe to the Virgin Mary, and intreated her to ſuccour a help-

a helpleſs maid againſt the infernal powers.

Her prayers were heard, and the devils vanquiſhed. Cyprian was thereupon converted, and embraced the chriſtian faith, and was afterwards an illuſtrious biſhop, and obtained the crown of martyrdom with St. Juſtina. This ſtory, ſays Phocius, was largely mentioned by the empreſs Eudocia, in an heroic poem of three books. Biſhop Fell thinks the ſtory is much interpolated, or rather invented by ſome of thoſe who took pleaſure in improving the lives of martyrs with ſome new materials. Dr. Cave juſtly ſuſpects that this Cyprian is a different perſon from the great biſhop of Carthage, and by miſtake confounded with him by Nazianzen, Prudentius, Metaphraſtus, and others. However, he truly obſerves, that the hiſtory is older than the times of Nazianzen.

But not to lay greater ſtreſs upon ſuch things than they challenge from the credit of the relators, and the probability which they carry upon the face of them, let it ſuffice to have mentioned only thoſe two inſtances, and refer the credibility to the judgment of the candid reader.

The Jews, thoſe profeſſed enemies of our Saviour, that Gentile brood of blinded progenitors, and obſtinate miſcreants, have vented many falſities againſt the Virgin Mary, in the book called Toledos Jeſu; or the life of Jeſus Chriſt; which they themſelves have publiſhed. From this treatiſe ſome of our puny modern deiſts, aſſembled in their petty mechanical clubs of Robin-Hood, &c. ſeem to have adopted thoſe infamous notions that tend to blacken the Virgin, with regard to our Saviour's deſcent and birth; and in direct oppoſition to the evangelical hiſtory of that ſacred event.

However contemptible, in reality, ſuch adverſaries are upon ſeveral accounts, thus much ſeems neceſſary to be ſaid, in order to obviate the poiſon which they ſpread among the middle, and lower claſſes of mankind, with whom they are converſant.

Even the Mahometans entertain great ſentiments of reſpect and eſteem for the Bleſſed Virgin; which one would hardly believe of people ſo far out of the way of ſalvation. [See the chapter in the Alcoran, about Mary and Herbelot.] But they do not confine themſelves within the bounds of truth and ſobriety;

briety; for they add many fabulous ſtories, which we ſhall not repeat, to what are otherwiſe known concerning Mary.

As to the purity of the Holy Virgin, in her birth, and in the conception of the *word*, and with regard to her virginity, both before and after her bringing forth, they ſpeak in ſuch a manner as might well be a ſhame to many Chriſtians, and particularly quaſh the brutal effrontery of the above-mentioned pygmean antagoniſts, in their impudent attempts to depreciate her: the main drift of which glances at, and is plainly meant, as a ſecret thruſt againſt her great and heavenly progeny.

The Mahometans ſay, in conformity to the goſpel account, "That the angel Gabriel was ſent to Mary, to declare to her the birth of Jeſus Chriſt." And further, "He ſaid to her, O Mary, thou art elected, purified, and in a moſt particular manner choſen from among all the women in the world! O Mary, ſubmit yourſelf to the Lord, proſtrate yourſelf, and adore him with all the creatures that worſhip him. I am come to tell you a great ſecret: God declares his word to you, whoſe name ſhall be Chriſt, or Jeſus the Meſſiah, who ſhall be your Son, moſt worthy of reſpect, both in this and the other world."

Abulfarage ſays, in his dynaſtics, it was a tradition among the oriental Chriſtians, that the holy Virgin was but thirteen years of age when ſhe brought forth Jeſus Chriſt; and that ſhe lived but to be fifty-one.

Some Muſſulmen falſely impute to the Chriſtians, that they acknowledge the Virgin Mary as the third perſon of the Holy Trinity; which miſtake proceeds from hence, that the Chriſtians of the eaſt give her the name of Alſeidia, which ſignifies the Lady; and among the Greek fathers, St. Cyril has unguardedly called her, "The ſupplement or completion of the moſt Holy Trinity." But others, among the Mahometans, vindicate us from this calumny.

Towards the end of the fourth century, the perpetual virginity of the mother of our Lord was oppoſed by ſome. Epiphanius gives theſe the name of Antidico-marianiſts, or enemies to Mary. They held, that after the birth of Jeſus Chriſt, Joſeph had other children by her, whom the goſpel call, The brethren of our Lord.

This conceit, which came originally

nally from the Eunomians and Apolinariſts, ſpread itſelf more particularly in Arabia. Some time after it was carried to Rome by Helvidius, and entertained by a certain biſhop, who is thought to be the hereſiarch Bonoſus; but it pleaſed God to ſuppreſs it by three of the greateſt men of that age, namely, St. Epiphanius, St. Jerome, and St. Ambroſe; to ſay nothing of St. Auguſtine, who did not write profeſſedly againſt it, but encountered it in his other writings.

Without reciting here the arguments made uſe of on the occaſion, it may ſuffice to conclude with St. Bazil, "That though this opinion does not effect the foundations of religion, which only requires us to believe that Mary continued a virgin till the birth of Jeſus Chriſt, as the goſpel aſſures us, yet it offends the ears of pious chriſtians for any to affirm that ſhe ever ceaſed to be ſuch."

Many indeed have been ſo bold as to deny this truth, becauſe not recorded in the ſacred writings; and not only ſo, but to aſſert the contrary as delivered in the ſcriptures; but with no ſucceſs. For though as they object, St. Matthew teſtified, "that Joſeph knew not Mary, until ſhe had brought forth her firſt-born ſon," from whence they would infer, that afterwards he knew her; yet the manner of the ſcripture language produceth no ſuch inference. When God ſaid to Jacob, "I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have ſpoken to thee of," Gen. xviii. 18. it follows not, that when that was done, the God of Jacob left him. When the concluſion of Deuteronomy was written, it was ſaid of Moſes, "No man knoweth of his ſepulchre unto this day." But it would be a weak argument to infer from thence, that the ſepulchre of Moſes hath not been known ever ſince. Again, it is true that Chriſt is termed the firſt born ſon of Mary. From whence they infer ſhe muſt needs have a ſecond; but might as well conclude, that whereſoever there is one, there muſt be two. For in this particular, the ſcripture notion of priority excludeth an antecedent, but infereth not a conſequent. It ſuppoſes none to have gone before, but concludeth not any to follow after.—"Sanctify unto me (ſaid God) all the firſt-born;" which was a firm and fixed law, immediately obliging upon the birth. Whereas, if the firſt-born had included a relation to a ſecond, there could have been no preſent certainty, but a ſuſpenſion of

of obedience. Nor had the firſt-born been ſanctified of itſelf, but the ſecond had ſanctified the firſt.

As to our Lord's brethren, it has been hinted before in what ſenſe they are ſo called.

Some, inſtead of leſſening, have over-magnified the Bleſſed Virgin, reſpecting her as a Goddeſs: and offering up prayers and oblations in her name: and particularly a kind of bread or cakes which the Greeks called Collyride, whence theſe heretics were named Collyridians. They were principally a ſet of women in Arabia, who fell into this kind of idolatry. Epiphanius wrote on purpoſe to confute this ſuperſtition, ſhewing how the honour due to the Bleſſed Virgin ought to be diſtinguiſhed from that adoration and worſhip which are proper to God alone; leſt we ſhould glorify the creature inſtead of the Creator.

The Neſtorians came next in order of time; they denied the Bleſſed Virgin the honourable appellation, which the church then, and long before, had given her, viz. *The Mother of God.* Becauſe they would not allow that her ſon was God incarnate, they were condemned by a general council held at Epheſus in the year 431.

The Eutychian heretics, who quickly followed the Neſtorians, ran into the contrary extreme. For pretending to draw an argument for their hereſy from the quality of the mother of God, they gloried in paying her more honour than the Catholics. And Peter Fullo, one of the worſt of them, who had thrice uſurped the ſee of Antioch, was the firſt who began to call upon her by way of invocation in prayer; in which he was too groſſly followed by thoſe who otherwiſe condemned him as an heretic: namely, thoſe of the Romiſh communion.

The worſhip of the Virgin Mary univerſally prevails in the countries where the Romiſh religion is profeſſed, but no where with greater pomp of ſuperſtition and ſplendour of outward veneration than at Loretto, a city in the marquiſite of Ancona, belonging to the eccleſiaſtical ſtate in Italy, where is an immenſe profuſion of treaſure, which has been offered to her at different times by the votaries of that religion in all ages, ever ſince the Romiſh clergy have made the belief paſs current that the Santa Caſa, or holy houſe, in which the bleſſed Virgin Mary is ſaid to have been born, ſaluted by the angel, and brought up her

her ſon till he was twelve years of age, and which the Roman Catholics pretend was by the miniſtry of angels carried through the air from Galilee to Terſato in Dalmatia, on the eaſt ſide of the Adriatic ſea in the year 1291, and in three years and a half afterwards tranſported over the gulph of Venice into Italy, and after two or three ſhort migrations or removals was at length fixed in its preſent ſituation at Loretto. Over this holy houſe is a magnificent church built, and in it an image of the bleſſed Virgin placed in a niche with the heavenly infant on her right arm, and a tripple crown on her head, the whole being covered with diamonds and pearls, and round it a ſort of rainbow of precious ſtones of various colours. All the altars, utenſils, and ornaments, are immenſely rich. The ſacriſty or treaſury is filled with jewels, gold veſſels, and ornaments more precious than gold itſelf; the votive preſents of emperors, kings, princes, empreſſes, queens, popes, and other perſonages of both ſexes for theſe many hundred years paſt: works of ſilver are not thought worthy to be admitted here. The whole is computed to be worth nine millions of ſix dollars. The annual revenue of the Santa Caſa in land, &c. is between twenty ſeven and thirty thouſand crowns, beſides preſents and votive donations. To this holy houſe five hundred thouſand pilgrims have often reſorted in one year, between Eaſter and Whitſuntide; and during two days in September, at the feſtival of the bleſſed Virgin's Nativity, no leſs than two hundred thouſand have viſited Loretto. This prodigious contourſe of people was, indeed, before the reformation; but the uſual number now is between forty and fifty thouſand; and as none of theſe come empty handed, we may eaſily conclude, that its riches are ſtill increaſing. This is reckoned by all good catholics to be the moſt ſacred place under heaven.

"Some writers, (ſays Dr. Nichols) both in the Greek and Latin church, tell a ſtrange ſtory about the bleſſed Virgin's aſſumption into heaven; and that with great variety in their relation; ſome affirming her to be conveyed thither alive, like Enoch and Elias; others, that after her death ſhe aroſe again, and was carried triumphantly into heaven. But all the hiſtory of this tranſlation is taken from apocryphal books, which deſerve not much credit.

dit. And though the church of Rome has adopted this ſtory into her worſhip, and celebrates it annually with a particular ſervice on the fifteenth of Auguſt; yet the authors who ſupport this hiſtory, are condemned by all the learned men of that church."

It muſt be acknowledged, that this notion is of conſiderable antiquity; for it is undoubtedly as old as Epiphanius, who, in his account of it, ſays, "he will do nothing to depreciate the honour of the Virgin; and therefore will neither give his aſſent to that opinion, nor yet contradict it; but rather acquieſce in the Scriptures, which ſay nothing of it."

MARY the Siſter of LAZARUS.

THIS holy woman has been prepoſterouſly confounded with the ſinful perſon who ſat at the feet of the bleſſed Jeſus weeping, while he was at meat in the houſe of Simon the leper. (See Luke vii. 37, 39.) Who this ſinner was is unknown; ſome will have her to be Mary Magdalane; but this opinion has nothing more than conjecture for its baſis.

But whoever that ſinner was, ſhe was a very different perſon from Mary the ſiſter of Lazarus, who, with her ſiſter Martha, lived with their brother at Bethany, a village near Jeruſalem. The bleſſed Jeſus had a particular affection for this family, and often retired to their houſe with his diſciples. One day, and perhaps the firſt time that Jeſus went thither, Martha received him with remarkable affection, and took the greateſt pains in providing a proper entertainment for him: but Mary her ſiſter continued ſitting at our Saviour's feet, liſtening to his words with peculiar attention. This Martha conſidered as an inſtance of diſreſpect, and therefore ſaid to Jeſus, "Lord, doſt thou not care that my ſiſter hath left me to ſerve alone? bid her, therefore, that ſhe help me." But the bleſſed Jeſus juſtified Mary, by telling her ſiſter, that ſhe had choſen the better part, which ſhould not be taken from her.

Some time after their brother Lazarus

Lazarus fell ſick, and his ſiſters ſent to acquaint Jeſus of the misfortune; but he did not arrive at Bethany till after Lazarus was dead. Martha hearing Jeſus was come into the neighbourhood, went and told him, that if he had not been abſent her brother had been ſtill alive. Jeſus promiſed her that her brother ſhould riſe again. To which Martha anſwered, "I know that he ſhall riſe again at the laſt day." Jeſus replied, "I am the reſurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet ſhall he live: and whoſoever liveth and believeth in me ſhall never die." Believeſt thou this? Martha anſwered, "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art Chriſt the Son of God, which ſhould come into the world."

Having ſaid this, ſhe departed, and gave her ſiſter notice privately, that Jeſus was come. Mary, as ſoon as ſhe heard the welcome tidings, aroſe and went to Jeſus: and as Martha had done before her, ſaid, "Lord, if thou hadſt been here my brother had not died." The bleſſed Jeſus was greatly moved at the pathetic complaints of theſe two worthy ſiſters, and on aſking where they had buried him, they conducted him to the ſepulchre.

On his arrival at the place where the body of Lazarus was depoſited, the great Redeemer of mankind groaned deeply in his ſpirit: he wept, he prayed to his Father, and then cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus come forth." The dead obeyed the voice of the Son of God, Lazarus immediately revived, and Jeſus reſtored him to his ſiſters.

After performing this ſtupendous miracle, Jeſus departed from the neighbourhood of Jeruſalem, and did not return thither till ſome days before the paſſover. Six days before that feſtival Jeſus came again to Bethany with his diſciples, and was invited to a ſupper at the houſe of Simon the leper. Martha attended, and Lazarus was one of the gueſts.

During the ſupper, Mary, to expreſs her gratitude, took a pound of ſpikenard, a very precious perfume, and poured it on the head and feet of Jeſus, wiping his feet with the hair of her head; and the whole houſe was filled with the odour of the ointment. Judas Iſcariot was highly offended at this generous action; but his maſter vindicated Mary, and told him, that by this ſhe had prevented his embalment, ſigni-

ſignifying, that his death and burial were at hand.

After this we have no account of Mary, the ſiſter of Lazarus, in the ſacred writings. Several authors, indeed, by not diſtinguiſhing properly between Mary the ſiſter of Martha, and Mary Magdalene, ſay, that ſhe was preſent at the crucifixion of the great Redeemer of mankind; and alſo that both ſhe and her ſiſter accompanied the women who went to embalm the body. This is not, indeed, improbable; but it is certain neither of them are particularly mentioned by the evangeliſts. The ancient Latins believed, and the Greeks are ſtill of the ſame opinion, that both Martha and Mary continued at Jeruſalem, and died there; and ſeveral ancient Martyrologiſts place their feaſt on the nineteenth of January.

JOSEPH.

JOSEPH, or Joſes, was the ſon of Mary Cleophas, brother to St. James the Leſs, and a near relation to the bleſſed Jeſus, according to the fleſh; being the ſon of Mary, the Holy Virgin's ſiſter, and Cleophas, who was Joſeph's brother, or ſon to Joſeph himſelf, as ſeveral of the ancients ſuppoſe; who have aſſerted that Joſeph was married to Mary Cleophas, or Eſcha, before he was married to the Holy Virgin. Some believe Joſeph, the ſon of Mary Cleophas, to be the ſame with Joſeph Barſabas, ſirnamed the Juſt, who is mentioned in the acts of the apoſtles, and was propoſed with St. Matthias, to fill up the traitor Judas's place: but in this there is no certainty at all. We learn nothing particular in ſcripture concerning Joſeph, the brother of our Lord. If he was one of thoſe among his near kinſmen who did not believe in him, when they would have perſuaded him to go to the feaſt of tabernacles, ſome months before our Saviour's death, it is probable that he was afterwards converted: for it is intimated in ſcripture, that at laſt all our Saviour's brethren believed in him: and St. Chryſoſtom ſays, that they were ſignalized for the eminence of their faith and virtue.

JOSEPH

JOSEPH of ARIMATHEA.

JOSEPH of Arimathea, or of Ranatha, Rama or Ramula, a city between Joppa and Jeruſalem, was a Jewiſh ſenator, and privately a diſciple of Jeſus Chriſt: he was not conſenting to the deſigns of the reſt of the Jews, particularly of the members of the Sanhedrim, who condemned and put Jeſus to death: and when our Saviour was dead, he went boldly to Pilate, and deſired the body of Jeſus in order to bury it. This he obtained; and accordingly he buried it after an honourable manner, in a ſepulchre newly made in a garden; which was upon the ſame mount Calvary where Jeſus had been crucified. After he had placed it there, he cloſed the entrance of it with a ſtone cut particularly for this purpoſe, and which exactly filled the open part of it.

The Greek church keeps the feſtival of Joſeph of Arimathea, on the 31ſt of July.

We do not meet with his name in the old Latin Martyrologies; nor was it inſerted in the Roman, till after the year 1585. The body of Joſeph of Arimathea was, it is ſaid, brought to the abbey of Moyenmontier, by Fortunatus, archbiſhop of Grada; to which Charlemain had given this monaſtery under the denomination of a benefice. Here the body of this ſaint was honoured, till the tenth age; but then the monaſtery being given to canons, who continued ſeventy years there, the relicks of this ſaint were carried away by ſome foreign monks; and ſo loſt, with many others.

NICODEMUS.

NICODEMUS, one of the diſciples of our bleſſed Saviour, was a Jew by nation, and by ſect a Phariſee. The goſpel calls him a ruler

ruler of the Jews; and Chriſt gives him the name of a maſter of Iſrael. When our Saviour began to manifeſt himſelf by his miracles at Jeruſalem, at the firſt paſſover which he celebrated there after his baptiſm, Nicodemus made no doubt but that he was the Meſſiah, and came to him by night, that he might learn of him the way to ſalvation. Jeſus told him, that no one could ſee the kingdom of heaven, except he ſhould be born again. Nicodemus, taking this in the literal ſenſe, made anſwer, how can a man be born again? Can he enter a ſecond time into his mother's womb? To which Jeſus replied, if a man be not born again of water and the ſpirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the fleſh, is fleſh; and that which is born of the ſpirit, is ſpirit. Nicodemus aſked him, how can theſe things be? Jeſus anſwered: "Art thou a maſter of Iſrael, and ignorant of theſe things? We tell you what we know, and you receive not our teſtimony. If you believe not common things, and which may be called earthly, how will you believe me if I ſpeak to you of heavenly things? Nobody has aſcended into heaven, but the Son of God, who came down from thence. And juſt as Moſes lifted up the brazen ſerpent in the wilderneſs, ſo muſt the Son of Man be lifted up on high: for God has ſo loved the world that he has given his only ſon; ſo that no man who believes in him ſhall periſh, but ſhall have eternal life."

After this converſation, Nicodemus became a diſciple of Jeſus Chriſt; and there is no doubt to be made but he came to hear him, as often as our Saviour came to Jeruſalem. It happened, on a time, that the prieſts and Phariſees had ſent officers to ſeize Jeſus, who returned to them, and made this report, that never man ſpoke as he did; to which the Phariſees replied, "Are you alſo of his diſciples? Is there any one of the Elders or Phariſees that have believed in him?" Then Nicodemus thought himſelf obliged to make anſwer, ſaying, does the law permit us to condemn any one before he is heard? To which they replied, Are you alſo a Galilean? Read the ſcriptures, and you will find that never any prophet came out of Galilee. After this the council was diſmiſſed. At laſt Nicodemus declared himſelf openly a diſciple of Jeſus Chriſt, when he came with Joſeph of Arimathea

mathea to pay the laſt duties to the body of Chriſt crucified; which they took down from the croſs, embalmed, and laid in the ſepulchre.

Nicodemus received baptiſm from the diſciples of Chriſt; but it is uncertain whether before or after his paſſion.

The Jews being informed of this, depoſed him from his dignity of ſenator, excommunicated, and drove him from Jeruſalem. It is ſaid alſo, that they would have put him to death; but that in conſideration of Gamaliel, who was his uncle, or couſin-german, they contented themſelves with beating him almoſt to death, and plundering his goods.

Gamaliel conveyed him to his country houſe, and provided him with what was neceſſary for his ſupport: and when he died, Gamaliel buried him honourably near St. Stephen.

His body was diſcovered in 415, together with thoſe of St. Stephen and Gamaliel; and the Latin church pays honour to all three, on the third of Auguſt.

An apocryphal goſpel under the name of Nicodemus is ſtill extant; which in ſome manuſcripts bears the title of the acts of Pilate: but it is certain that this is not what the ancients cite under the name of the acts of Pilate, which this laſt ſent to Tiberius; being only a modern piece, full of fables and abſurdities, and deſerving no regard to be paid it. At the end of this ſpurious goſpel are read theſe words, which are ſufficient to ſhew its falſity: "In the name of the Holy Trinity here, and the acts of our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt," which were found at Jeruſalem by Theodoſius the Great, in the pretorim of Pontius Pilate, in the public acts, which were written in the 19th year of the emperor Tiberus, and the 17th year of Herod, ſon of Herod, king of Galilee, the 8th day, before the kalends of April, &c. in the 202d olympiad, under the chief prieſts, Joſeph and Caiphas; which was brought to the form of a hiſtory by Nicodemus, and written in Hebrew after the crucifixion and paſſion of our Saviour.

NICHOLAS.

NICHOLAS.

NICHOLAS was a proſelyte at Antioch, and there converted from the Pagan to the Jewiſh religion; but the time of his birth is uncertain. Afterwards he embraced Chriſtianity, and was one of the moſt zealous and holy men among the firſt Chriſtians: ſo that he was choſen for one of the ſeven firſt deacons of the church of Jeruſalem. His memory has been tarniſhed in the church by a blemiſh from which it has not been poſſible to clear him hitherto. Certain heretics were called Nicholaites, from his name: and though perhaps he had no ſhare in their errors nor irregularities, yet he is ſuſpected at leaſt to have given ſome handle to them. This is what the ancients inform us in this matter. He had a wife who was very handſome: and in imitation of thoſe who aimed at a great degree of perfection he left her to live in a ſtate of continency. St. Epiphanius ſays that he did not perſevere in this reſolution; but took his wife again: and, in order to juſtify his conduct, he advanced principles contrary to truth and purity. He plunged himſelf into irregularities, and gave beginning to the ſect of Nicholaites, to that of the Gnoſtics, and to ſeveral others, who, following the bent of their paſſions, invented a thouſand different ſorts of crimes and enormities.

St. Epiphanius is ſupported in this by ſeveral ancient fathers of the church; as Iræneus, Tertullian, Hyppolitus, Hilary, Gregory of Nyſſa, Philaſter of Breſſa, Jerome, Caſſian, Gregory the Great, Pacian, Pope Gelaſius, Gilda, and alſo by many moderns, who ſay that Nicholas, the deacon, was head and author of the infamous and impious ſect of the Nicholaites.

But Clemens Alexandrinus, who was more ancient than Epiphanius, expreſſes great eſteem for Nicholas; and relates the affair quite otherwiſe. The apoſtles, ſays he, having made ſome reproaches on Nicholas, as being too jealous of his wife, he cauſed her to come before them all; and declared that any one might eſpouſe her that pleaſed. This declaration which he made in pure ſimplicity, and without due reflection

reflection, was only designed as a proof of the little attachment and passion he had for his wife: and in reality, as St. Clemens adds, have been informed he never cohabited with any other woman. And with regard to his son and daughters, who lived to a pretty old age, they always remained in a state of perfect virginity. But such as were willing to use the pretence of Nicholas's authority, vindicated themselves by what he had done, in order to abandon themselves to all sorts of irregularity.

These hereticks, as the same Clemens reports, grounded themselves upon a word which Nicholas let drop, that the flesh ought to be abused. By which, nothing else was meant but that we ought to suppress our inclinations to sensuality, and concupiscence; and to mortify the passions and impetuosity of the flesh.

Whereas these disciples of pleasure explained the words according to their own sensuality, and not agreeably to the meaning of this apostolic man. Eusebius having related that the Nicholaites gloried in having Nicholas the deacon, as the author of their sect, confutes them by adducing at length this passage of Clemens. Theodoret does the same, and he declares still more openly for the sentiment of Clemens.

For excusing the permission of Nicholas, by which he allowed any one to marry his wife, he says, that the deacon had in reality no inclination to permit it; but only intended by this voluntary offer, to confute those who had raised a murmuring against him.

St. Austin, Victorinus, Petaviensis, Isidorus, and the council of Tours also acquit Nicholas.

Cassian says, that some distinguished Nicholas the founder of the sect of the Nicholaites from the person of the same name, who was one of the first seven deacons. Probably he would hint at the author of the apostolical constitutions, who says that the Nicholaites unjustly screen themselves under the authority of Nicholas, one of the first deacons. Jesus Christ, in two places of the revelation of St. John, condemns the actions and doctrines of the Nicholaites. He says, he hates them: he makes it a merit in the bishop of Ephesus, that he abhors them; and reproaches the bishop of Pergamus that some of his church adhered to their doctrines. In all

theſe paſſages St. John does not inſinuate the leaſt thing that may ſeem to excuſe Nicholas; nor to clear him from the accuſation of his being the author of the ſect of Nicholaites: and beſides we ſee that no Chriſtian church has ever paid any honour to the memory of Nicholas, which is a great circumſtance againſt him.

JOHN MARK.

JOHN MARK, couſin of St. Barnabas, and a diſciple of his, was the ſon of a Chriſtian woman, named Mary, who had a houſe in Jeruſalem, where the apoſtles and the faithful generally uſed to meet. Here they were at prayers in the night, when St. Peter, who was delivered out of priſon by the angel, came and knocked at the door: and in this houſe the celebrated church of Sion was ſaid to have been afterwards eſtabliſhed.

John Mark, whom ſome very improperly confound with the evangeliſt St. Mark, adhered to St. Paul and St. Barnabas, and followed them in their return to Antioch: he continued in their company and ſervice till they came to Perga, in Pamphylia; but then ſeeing that they were undertaking a longer journey, he left them, and returned to Jeruſalem. This happened in the year 45, of the common æra.

Some years after, that is to ſay in the year 51, Paul and Barnabas preparing to return into Aſia, in order to viſit the churches, which they had formed there, was of opinion, that John Mark ſhould accompany them in this journey; but Paul would not conſent to it: upon which occaſion theſe two apoſtles ſeparated. Paul went to Aſia, and Barnabas with John Mark, to the iſle of Cyprus. What John Mark did after this journey we do not know, till we find him at Rome in the year 63, performing ſignal ſervice for St. Paul, during his impriſonment.

The apoſtle ſpeaks advantageouſly of him in his epiſtle to the Coloſſians, "Marcus, ſiſter's ſon to Barnabas, ſaluteth you. If he cometh unto

unto you receive him." He makes mention of him again in his epiſtle to Philemon, written in the year 62, at which time he was with St. Paul at Rome; but in the year 65 he was with Timothy in Aſia. And St. Paul writing to Timothy, deſires him to bring Marcus to Rome; adding, that he was uſeful to him for the miniſtry of the goſpel.

In the Greek and Latin churches, the feſtival of John Mark is kept on the 27th of September. Some ſay that he was biſhop of Biblis, in Phœnicia. The Greeks give him the title of apoſtle; and ſay that the ſick were cured by his ſhadow only. It is very probable that he died at Epheſus, where his tomb was very much celebrated and reſorted to. He is ſometimes called ſimply John, or Mark. The year of his death we are ſtrangers to; and ſhall not collect all that is ſaid of him in apocryphal and uncertain authors.

CLEMENT.

CLEMENT is mentioned by St. Paul, in his epiſtle to the Philippians, where the apoſtle ſays that Clement's name is written in the book of life. The generality of the fathers, and other interpeters make no queſtion but that this is the ſame Clement who ſucceeded St. Paul, after Linus and Cletus, in the government of the church of Rome; and this ſeems to be intimated, when in the office for St. Clement's day, that church appoints this part of the epiſtle to the Philippians to be read. On the contrary, Grotius is of opinion, that the Clement St. Paul ſpeaks of was no more than a prieſt of the church of Philippi.

We find ſeveral things relating to Clement's life, in the recognitions and conſtitutions called apoſtolical; but as thoſe works are not looked upon as authentic, though there may be truths in them derived from the tradition of the firſt ages, little ſtreſs is to be laid upon their teſtimony. St. Chryſoſtom thinks that Clement, mentioned by St. Paul in his epiſtle to the Philippians,

pians, was one of the apoſtle's conſtant fellow-travellers. Irenæus, Origin, Clemens of Alexandria, and others of the ancients, aſſert, that Clement was a diſciple of the apoſtles; that he had ſeen them, and heard their inſtructions. St. Epiphanius, Jerome, Rufinus, Bede, and ſome others, were of opinion, that as the apoſtles St. Peter and St. Paul could not be continually at Rome, by reaſon of the frequent journies which they were obliged to make to other places, and it was not proper that the city of Rome ſhould be without a biſhop, there was a neceſſity to ſupply the want of them by eſtabliſhing Linus, Anaclet, and Clement there. The conſtitutions inform us, that Linus was ordained by St. Paul; Tertullian and Epiphanius ſay, that St. Peter ordained Clement. Rufinus tells us that this apoſtle choſe St. Clement for his ſucceſſor. But Epiphanius believes, that after he had been made biſhop of Rome by St. Peter, he refuſed to exerciſe his office, till after the death of Linus and Anaclet, he was obliged to take upon him the care of the church; and this is the moſt generally received opinion. St. Peter's immediate ſucceſſor was Linus; Linus was ſucceeded by Anacletus; and Anacletus by Clement, in the year of Chriſt ninety-one, which was the tenth of Domitian's reign.

During his pontificate, the church of Corinth having been diſturbed by a ſpirit of diviſion, St. Clement wrote a large letter to the Corinthians, which is ſtill extant, and was ſo much eſteemed by the ancients, that they read it publickly in many churches; and ſome have been inclined to range it among the canonical writings. The emperor Domitian intended to declare war againſt the church of Jeſus Chriſt, a revelation of his deſign was made to Hermas, and he ordered to give a copy of it to pope Clement, that he might communicate it to other churches, and exhort them to provide againſt the ſtorm. We have no certain accounts of what happened to St. Clement, during this perſecution: but we are very well aſſured that he lived to the third year of Trajan; which is the hundredth of Jeſus Chriſt. His feſtival is ſet down by Bede, and all the Latin Martyrologies, on the twenty-thrird of November. The Greeks honour him on the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth of the ſame month. Rufinus, and pope Zozimus, give him

him the title of Martyr; and the Roman church, in its canon, places him among the ſaints who have ſacrificed their lives for Jeſus Chriſt. We read in an ancient hiſtory, to the authenticity of which, however, there are ſome exceptions, that St. Clement was baniſhed by Trajan, to the Cherſoneſus, beyond the Euxine ſea: beſides other particulars in the hiſtory, which we ſhall not mention, as having too much the air of fable.

MARY MAGDALENE.

MARY Magdalene was a native either of Magdala, a town in Galilee, on the other ſide Jordan, or Magdalos, a town ſituated at the foot of Mount Carmel, and had her ſirname from the place of her birth. Some will have it that ſhe was the ſinner mentioned by St. Luke, chap. vii. 36. &c. but this opinion is built only on conjecture. Both St. Matthew and St. Mark tell us, that Jeſus had caſt out of her ſeven devils; which ſome underſtand in a literal, and others in a figurative ſenſe.

But however this be, ſhe became a conſtant attendant on the bleſſed Jeſus, after he had removed her plague. She followed him to Mount Calvary, continued amidſt the Roman guards at the foot of the croſs, with the Holy Virgin, and ſaw his precious body laid in the tomb. After which ſhe returned to Jeruſalem to purchaſe ſpices to embalm him as ſoon as the ſabbath was over.

It was ſhe who carried the welcome tidings to Peter and John; and to her our bleſſed Lord himſelf firſt appeared after his reſurrection. The apoſtles did not however believe her report till it was confirmed by others, and they themſelves had ſeen the Saviour of the world.

We have no farther account of Mary Magdalene in the ſacred writings. But Modeſtus, archbiſhop of Conſtantinople, in the ſeventh century, tells us, that ſhe continued at Jeruſalem till the death

of the Holy Virgin, after which she retired to Ephesus, and lived with St. John till she sealed the faith she had so long professed with her blood. She was buried by the Christians at Ephesus, where her tomb was shewn in the seventh century.

But the emperor, Leo the Wise, caused her body to be removed from Ephesus to Constantinople, the latter end of the ninth century, in order to its being interred in the church erected to the honour of the apostles.

Thus have we given the fullest account of the followers of the blessed Jesus; the persons who spread the light of the gospel over the whole world, removed the veil of ignorance and superstition drawn over the kingdoms of the earth, and taught us the method of attaining eternal happiness in the courts of the new Jerusalem.

May we all follow their glorious examples! May we imitate their faith, their piety, their charity, and their love! Then shall we pass "through things temporal, in such a manner, that we shall finally gain the things eternal," and through the merits of an all perfect Redeemer, be admitted as worthy guests at the marriage-supper of the Lamb!

FINIS.

DIRECTIONS TO THE BINDER.

Place the Introductory Discourse immediately after the Preface; and then the Cuts as follow:

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A N

INTRODUCTORY DISSERTATION,

IN WHICH

The Evidences of CHRISTIANITY are fairly ſtated, the NEW TESTAMENT proved to be genuine, and the RELIGION of JESUS CHRIST truly Divine.

IT is a well atteſted truth, that immorality ever grows with infidelity, and to the prevalence of vice muſt certainly be imputed that ſcorn and deriſion in which too many in the preſent day hold the ſacred oracle of God, the revealed will of the Great Creator of Heaven and Earth.

From hence, therefore, it is reaſonable to aſk, what cauſe can produce ſo ſtrange a deviation from the ways of God? Doubtleſs from that unhappy diſregard, either to the Goſpel in general, or to his peculiar and eſſential truths, ſo viſible in the world, and which appears to be continually increaſing. It is too evident that multitudes among us like thoſe of old, who thought and profeſſed themſelves the wiſeſt of mankind, or, in other words, the *free-thinkers* of the age, have been deſirous of baniſhing God and his truths from their knowledge: and it is therefore the leſs to be wondered at, if *God has given them up to a reprobate mind*; to the moſt infamous luſt and enormities; and to a depth of degeneracy, which, while it is in part the natural conſequence, is in part alſo the juſt, but dreadful puniſhment of their apoſtacy from the faith. And I am perſuaded that thoſe who wiſh well to the cauſe of Chriſt, as every true Chriſtian moſt certainly does, cannot ſerve it more effectually, than by endeavouring to eſtabliſh men in their belief of the Goſpel in general, and to build them up in its moſt holy faith. The latter I flatter myſelf I have ſufficiently done in the following lives of the bleſſed Jeſus and his apoſtles and followers; and propoſe in this Diſſertation to prove, that the Chriſtian Religion is true, and owes its origin to God himſelf.

It will be needleſs to obſerve, that this is a matter of the higheſt importance, as every one will apprehend that it is the foundation of all our hopes. It is abſolutely neceſſary, in this age of libertiniſm, that every Chriſtian ſhould be able *to give a reaſon for the hope that is in him*, and to put to ſilence the tongues of thoſe men who have *evil will at Sion*. And may the Almighty enable me to plead his cauſe with ſucceſs! May the divine Spirit accompany theſe arguments, that the faith of my Readers being more and more eſtabliſh-

ed,

ed, it may appear that the tree is watered at the roots, by all the other graces growing and flouriſhing in an equal proportion!

God has made ample proviſion for the honour and ſupport of his Goſpel, by furniſhing it with a variety of proofs, which may, with undiminiſhed, and, indeed, with growing conviction, be diſplayed in the eyes of the whole world: and we ſhould be greatly wanting in gratitude to him, in zeal for a Redeemer's kingdom, and in charitable concern for the converſion of thoſe who reject the Goſpel, as well as for the edification of thoſe who embrace it, ſhould we wholly overlook thoſe arguments, or neglect to acquaint ourſelves with them. This is the evidence I am going to propoſe, and I beg my readers would peruſe it with becoming attention.

In proſecution of this great deſign, I ſhall endeavour more particularly to ſhew, that if we take the matter on a general ſurvey, it will appear highly probable, that ſuch a ſcheme of doctrines and precepts, as we find Chriſtianity to be, ſhould, indeed, have been a *divine revelation*; and then, that if we examine into the external evidence of it, we ſhall find it, *certain in fact*, that it was ſo, and that it had its origin from on high.

Firſt then, I am to ſhew, that taking the matter merely in theory, it will appear highly probable, that ſuch a ſyſtem as the Goſpel ſhould be, indeed, a divine revelation.

To prove this, I will endeavour to ſhew, That the ſtate of mankind was ſuch, as greatly to need a revelation; That there ſeems, from the light of nature, encouragement to hope, that God would grant one; That it is reaſonable to believe, that if any were made, it ſhould be introduced and tranſmitted, as we are told Chriſtianity was; and that its general nature and ſubſtance ſhould be ſuch, as we find that of the Goſpel is. If I can ſatisfactorily prove theſe particulars, there will be a ſtrong *preſumptive evidence* that the *Goſpel is from God*, and a fair way will be opened for that more *divine proof*, which I principally intend.

1. The caſe of mankind is naturally ſuch, as to need a divine revelation.

I would not be underſtood to ſpeak here of man in his original ſtate, though even then ſome inſtruction from above ſeemed neceſſary to inform him of many particulars, which it was highly proper for him then to know; but I ſpeak of him in the degenerate condition in which he now ſo evidently lies, by whatever means he fell into it. It is very eaſy to make florid encomiums on the perfection of *natural light*, and to deceive unwary readers by an ambiguous term, as Dr. Tindall has done in his *Chriſtianity as old as the Creation*; a fallacy beneath an ingenuous reaſoner, and which alone ought to have expoſed his book to the contempt of every ſerious reader. Truth needs no diſguiſe; a candid advocate ſcorns ſuch ſubterfuges; let facts ſpeak, and the controverſy will ſoon be decided. I appeal to every intelligent reader, who is acquainted with the records of antiquity, or that has any knowledge of the preſent ſtate of thoſe countries where Chriſtianity is unknown, whether it is not too obvious a truth, that the whole heathen world has lain, and ſtill lies, in a ſtate of wickedneſs. Have not the greater part of them been perpetually bewildered in their religious notions and practices, very different from each other, and almoſt equally differing on all ſides from the appearances of truth and reaſon? Is any thing ſo wild as not to have been believed; any thing ſo infamous as not to have been practiſed by them, while they not only pretended to juſtify it by reaſon, but to have conſecrated it as

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as a part of their religion? To this very day, what are the diſcoveries of new nations in the American or African world; but, generally ſpeaking, the opening new ſcenes of enormity? Rapine, luſt, cruelty, human ſacrifices, and the moſt ſtupid idolatries, are, and for ought I can find, always have been, the morality and religion of almoſt all the Pagan nations under heaven; and if they have diſcovered a dawn of reaſon, it has only ſufficed to convince them of the want of an abler guide, to direct them in purſuit of real happineſs.

But perhaps ſome of my readers have only heard thoſe things by uncertain report. If this be the caſe, look around you within the ſphere of your own obſervation, and remark the temper and character of the generality of thoſe who have been educated in a Chriſtian, and even in a Proteſtant country. Obſerve their ignorance and forgetfulneſs of the Divine Being, their impieties, their debaucheries, their fraud, their oppreſſion, their pride, their avarice, their ambition, their unnatural inſenſibility of the wants, ſorrows, and intereſts of each other; and when you ſee how bad they generally are in the midſt of ſo many advantages, judge by that of the probable ſtate in thoſe that want them. When the candid reader has well weighed theſe particulars, let him judge whether a *revelation* be an *unneceſſary* thing.

2. There is, from the light of nature, conſiderable encouragement to hope that God would favour his creatures with ſo deſirable a thing as a revelation appears to be.

That a revelation is in itſelf a poſſible thing, is evident beyond all ſhadow of doubt. Shall not He that *made man's mouth*, who has given us this wonderful faculty of diſcovering our ſentiments, and communicating our ideas to each other; ſhall not he be able to converſe with his rational creatures, and by ſenſible manifeſtations, or inward impreſſions, to convey the knowledge of things, which lie beyond the diſcernment of their natural faculties, and yet may be highly conducive to their advantage? To own a God, and to deny him ſuch a power, would be a notorious contradiction. But it may appear much more dubious, whether he will pleaſe to confer ſuch a favour on ſinful creatures.

Now I acknowledge that we could not certainly conclude he would never do it; conſidering, on the one hand, how juſtly they ſtood expoſed to his final diſpleaſure: and on the other, what proviſion he had made by the frame of the human mind, and, of nature around us, for giving us ſuch notices of himſelf, as would leave us inexcuſable, if we either failed to know him, or to glorify him as God, as the apoſtle argues at large (Rom. i. 20, &c.) Nevertheleſs, we ſhould, methinks, have ſomething of this kind to hope, from conſidering God as the indulgent father of his creatures; from obſerving the tender care he takes of us, and the liberal ſupply which he grants for the ſupport of the animal life; eſpecially from the proviſion he has made for man, conſidered as a guilty and calamitous creature, by the medicinal and healing virtues he has given to the production of nature, which man, in a perfect ſtate of rectitude and happineſs, never would have needed.

3. This is a circumſtance which ſeems ſtrongly to intimate, that he would ſome time or other graciouſly provide an adequate remedy to heal the minds of the children of men; and that he would interpoſe to inſtruct them, in his own nature, in the manner which he is to be ſerved, and in the final treatment which they may expect from him. And I think, ſuch an apprehenſion ſeems very congruous to the ſentiments of the generality of mankind,

as appears from the many pretences to divine revelation, which have often been made, and the readiness of multitudes to receive them upon very slender proofs: a sufficient proof that men naturally expect some such kind of interposition of the Almighty.

3. It is natural to conclude, that if a revelation were to be given, it would be introduced and transmitted, in such a manner as the Evangelists tell us Christianity was.

It is, for instance, highly probable, that it should be taught either by some illustrious person, sent down from a superior world, or at least by a man of eminent wisdom and piety, who should himself have been not only a teacher, but an example of righteousness. In order to this, it seems probable, that he should be led through a series of calamities and distress; since otherwise he could not have been a pattern of that resignation, which adorns adversity, and is peculiar to it. And it might also have been expected, that, in the extremity of his distress, the Almighty, whose messenger he was, should, in some extraordinary manner, have interposed either to preserve, or to recover him from death.

It is, moreover, exceeding probable, that such a person, and perhaps also those who were at first employed as his messengers to the world, should be endowed with a power of working miracles, both to awaken men's attentions, and to prove his divine mission, and the consequent truth of his doctrine, some of which might, perhaps, be capable of no other proof; or if they were, it is certain that no method of arguing is so short, so plain, and so forcible, and on the whole so well suited to conviction, and probably the reformation of mankind, as a course of evident, repeated, and uncontrouled miracles. And such method of proof is especially adapted to the populace, who are incomparably the greater part of mankind, and for whose benefit we may assure ourselves a revelation would be chiefly designed. I might add, it was no way improbable, though not in itself certain, that a dispensation should open gradually to the world; and that the most illustrious messenger of God to men should be ushered in by some predictions which should raise a great expectation of his appearance, and have an evident accomplishment in him.

As for the propagation of a religion so introduced, it seems no way improbable, that having been thus established in its first age, it should be transmitted to future generations by credible testimony, as other important facts are. It is certain, that affairs of the utmost moment, transacted among men, depend on testimony: on this, voyages are undertaken, settlements made, and controversies decided; controversies on which not only the estates, but the lives of men depend. Though it must be owned, that such an historical evidence is not equally convincing with miracles which are wrought before mine own eyes; yet it is certain, it may rise to such degree as to exclude all reasonable doubt. I know not why we should expect, that the evidence of a revelation should be such, as universally to compel the immediate acquiescence of all to whom it is offered. To me it appears much more probable, that it should be so adjusted, as to be a kind of touchstone to the tempers and characters of men, capable, indeed, of giving ample satisfaction to the diligent and candid enquirer, yet attended with some circumstances, from whence the captious and perverse might take occasion to cavil and object. Such we might reasonably suppose a revelation would be, and such it is maintained Christianity is. The teachers of it undertake to prove, that it was thus introduced, thus established, and thus transmitted; and I trust, that this is strong presumption in its favour, especially as we can add

4. That the principal doctrines contained in the gospel are of such a nature, that we might in general suppose a divine revelation would be, rational, practical, and sublime.

It

It is natural to imagine, that in a revelation of a religion from God, the great principles of natural religion ſhould be clearly aſſerted, and ſtrongly maintained: Such, I mean, as the exiſtence, the unity, the perfection, and the providence of God; the eſſential and immutable difference between moral good and evil; the obligations we are under to the various branches of virtue, whether human, ſocial, or divine; the value and immortality of the ſoul; and the rewards and puniſhments of a future ſtate. All theſe particulars every rational perſon would conclude were contained in it; and that upon the whole it ſhould appear calculated to form men's minds to a proper temper, rather than to amuſe them with curious ſpeculations.

It might, indeed, be farther ſuppoſed, that ſuch a revelation would contain ſome things which could not have been learnt from the higheſt improvements of natural light: ſuch as that God would pardon the ſins of the moſt flagrant offender, on account of the ſatisfaction made by his dear Son, the Redeemer of the world; that he would work holy deſires in the hearts of his people by the power of his divine grace, and form them for happineſs hereafter, by implanting in them a principle of holineſs.

The reader's thoughts have undoubtedly prevented me in the application of theſe characters to the Chriſtian religion; and therefore it will be unneceſſary to juſtify that application. In ſhort, the Chriſtian ſyſtem is undoubtedly worthy of God, nor is it poſſible to imagine from whom elſe it could have proceeded.*

Thus have I conſidered the firſt branch of the argument, and ſhewn, I hope, ſatisfactorily, that taking the Chriſtian ſcheme only in theory, it appears highly probable. The truth is, that to embrace the goſpel is ſo ſafe, and upon the whole ſo comfortable a thing, that I think a wiſe man would deliberately venture his all upon it, though nothing more could be offered for its confirmation. But bleſſed be God, we have a great deal more to offer in this important cauſe; and can add, with ſtill greater confidence, that it is not only probable in theory, but

Secondly, That it is in fact certain, that Chriſtianity is, indeed, a divine revelation.

On this I confeſs the chief ſtreſs it to be laid; and therefore I ſhall inſiſt more largely on this branch of the argument, and endeavour, by the divine aſſiſtance, to prove the certainty of this great, this important fact. And in order to this, it will be neceſſary to ſhew,

I. That the books of the New Teſtament, now extant, may be depended upon as written by the firſt preachers and publiſhers of Chriſtianity. And,

II. That from hence it will certainly follow, that what they aſſert is true, and that the religion they teach brings with it ſuch evidences of a divine authority, as may juſtly recommend it to our acceptance.

Each of the heads would furniſh matter for ſeveral volumes, but as I am writing only a Diſſertation, it is my buſineſs to hint at the moſt obvious and important particulars by which they may briefly be illuſtrated and confirmed.

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* From what has been ſaid, it ſufficiently appears that revelation was abſolutely neceſſary to inſtruct mankind in the moſt important principles of religion, and conſequently Lord Bolingbroke's arguments, againſt the neceſſity of an extraordinary revelation, fall to the ground, like a mighty ſtructure when the foundation is deſtroyed.

I. I am to prove, that the books of the New Teſtament, now extant, were written by the firſt preachers and publiſhers of Chriſtianity.

I ſhall now confine myſelf to the books of the New Teſtament, as that particular part of the ſacred oracle has engroſſed my preſent attention, though I propoſe, on a future occaſion, to lay down ſome ſolid arguments in defence of the authenticity of the Old, which is an invaluable treaſure, being the very foundation of the New, and demands our daily pleaſing and grateful peruſal, and is capable of being defended in a manner I am perſuaded its moſt ſubtle enemies will never be able to anſwer.

After premiſing theſe particulars, I ſhall go on to the argument, and advance it by the following degrees. I ſhall prove, that Chriſtianity is an ancient religion.—That there was ſuch a perſon as Jeſus of Nazareth crucified above ſeventeen hundred years ago at Jeruſalem;—That the firſt preachers of his religion wrote books, which went by the name of thoſe that now make up the volume of the New Teſtament;—That they are preſerved in the original, to the preſent time;—And that the Engliſh tranſlation of them now publicly uſed is, in the main, faithful, and may be depended upon.

1, It is certain, that Chriſtianity is not a new religion, but a religion that was maintained by great multitudes ſoon after the time in which the goſpel tells us Jeſus appeared.

That there was, conſiderably more than ſixteen hundred years ago, a body of men that went by the name of Chriſtians, is almoſt as evident as that a race of men was then ſubſiſting in the world; nor do I know that any enemy to the religion of Jeſus has ever been vile and confident enough to diſpute it. Indeed there are ſuch numbers both of Chriſtian and Heathen writers, who atteſt this fact, that it would be madneſs to deny it, and therefore ſuperfluous for me to prove it. But I cannot help obſerving that Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny, Marcus Antonius, and others, not only atteſt the exiſtence of ſuch a body of men, but alſo inform us of the extreme perſecutions they underwent in the very infancy of their religion; a ſtrong evidence that they were firmly perſuaded their religion was from on high.

2. That there was ſuch a perſon as Jeſus of Nazareth, who was crucified at Jeruſalem when Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor there.

It can never be imagined that multitudes of people ſhould take their names from Chriſt, and ſacrifice their lives for their adherence to him, even in the ſame age in which he is ſaid to have lived, if they had not been well aſſured, that there was ſuch a perſon. Nay, Tacitus himſelf tells us, that he was put to death under Pontius Pilate, who was procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius. And it is well known that the primitive Chriſtian apologiſts often appeal to the acts of Pilate, or the memoirs of his government, which he, according to the cuſtom of all other procurators, tranſmitted to Rome, as containing an account of theſe tranſactions; and as the appeal was made to thoſe who had the command of the public records, we may aſſure ourſelves ſuch teſtimonies were then extant. But it is a fact which our enemies never denied. They owned it; they even gloried in it, and upbraided the Chriſtians with the infamous death of him whom they called their Saviour. Thus it ſufficiently appears that there was, at the time commonly ſuppoſed, ſuch

ſuch a perſon as Chriſt, who profeſſed himſelf a divine teacher, and who gathered many diſciples, by whom his religion was afterwards publiſhed in the world.

3. It is alſo certain that the firſt publiſhers of this religion wrote books, which contained an account of the life and doctrine of Jeſus their maſter, and which went by the names of thoſe that now make up our New Teſtament.

It was in the nature of things highly probable that they would declare and publiſh to the world, in writing, the things they had ſeen and heard; conſidering how common books were in the age and countries in which they taught; and of how great importance an acquaintance with the hiſtory and doctrine of Chriſt was to the purpoſes which they ſo ſtrenuouſly purſued; but we have much more than ſuch a preſumptive evidence.

The moſt inveterate adverſaries to Chriſtianity muſt grant that we have books of great antiquity, written ſome fourteen, ſome fifteen, and ſome ſixteen hundred years ago: in which mention is made of the life of Chriſt, as written by many, and eſpecially by four of his diſciples, who by way of eminence are ſtiled Evangeliſts. Great pains have, indeed, been taken to prove that ſome ſpurious pieces were publiſhed under the names of the apoſtles, containing the hiſtory of theſe things. But ſurely this muſt imply, that it was a thing known and allowed that the apoſtles did write ſome narrations of this kind; as counterfeit coin implies ſome true money which it is deſigned to repreſent. And I am ſure he muſt be very little acquainted with the ancient eccleſiaſtical writers, who does not know, that the primitive Chriſtians made a great difference between thoſe writings, which we call the canonical books of the New Teſtament, and others: which plainly ſhews that they did not judge of writings merely by the names of their pretended authors, but enquired with an accuracy becoming the importance of theſe pretences. The reſult of this enquiry was, that the four Goſpels, the Acts, thirteen Epiſtles of St. Paul, one of St. Peter, and one of St. John, were received upon ſuch evidence, that Euſebius, a moſt accurate and early critic in theſe things, could not learn that they had ever been diſputed. And afterwards the remaining books of the New Teſtament, namely, Hebrews—James—the ſecond of Peter—the ſecond and third of John—Jude—and the Revelations, were admitted as genuine, and added to the reſt. On the whole, it is ſufficiently plain, that the primitive Chriſtians were ſo thoroughly ſatisfied of the authority of the ſacred books, that they ſpeak of them, not only as credible and authentic, but as equal to the oracles of the Old Teſtament, as divinely inſpired, as the words of the ſpirit, as the law and organ of God, and as the rule of faith, which cannot be contradicted without the greateſt guilt; with many other expreſſions of the ſame kind, which often occur in their diſcourſes. To which I may add, that in ſome of their councils, the New Teſtament was placed on a throne, to ſignify their deſire, that all their controverſies might be determined, and their actions regulated by it.

From the whole, therefore, it is plain, that the primitive church did receive certain pieces which bore the ſame titles with the books of our New Teſtament. Now I think it is evident, that they were as capable of judging whether a book was written by Matthew, John, or Paul, as the ancient Romans could be of determining whether Horace, Tully or Livy, wrote thoſe which go under thoſe names. And I am ſure the intereſt of the former was much more concerned in the writings of the apoſtles, than that of the latter in the compoſition of their poets, orators, or even their hiſtorians; and there is reaſon to believe, they would take much greater care to inform themſelves fully in the

merits of the cauſe, and to avoid being impoſed upon by artifice and fiction. Let us now proceed to ſhew,

4. That the books of the New Teſtament have been preſerved in the main uncorrupted, to the preſent time, in the original language in which they were written.

This is a matter of the laſt importance; and bleſſed be God, we have a proportional evidence: an evidence, in which the hand of Providence has, indeed, been remarkably ſeen; for I am confident, that there is no other ancient book in the world, which may ſo certainly and ſo eaſily be proved to be authentic.

And here, I will not argue merely from the piety of the primitive Chriſtians, and the heroic actions and reſolutions with which they choſe to endure the greateſt extremities, rather than deliver up their Bibles, though that conſideration is evidently of the greateſt weight; but ſhall intreat my readers to conſider the utter impoſſibility of corrupting them. From the firſt ages they were received and read in churches, as a part of their public worſhip, juſt as Moſes and the prophets were in the Jewiſh ſynagogues: they were preſently ſpread far and near, as the boundaries of the church were increaſed; they were early tranſlated into other languages, of which tranſlations ſome remain to this very day. Now when this was the caſe, how could they poſſibly be adulterated? Is it a thing to be ſuppoſed and imagined, that thouſands and millions of people ſhould have come together from diſtant countries; and that, with all their diverſities of language and cuſtoms, and I may add, of ſentiments too, they ſhould have agreed on corrupting a book which they all acknowledged to be the rule of their faith, and their manners, and the great charter by which they held their eternal hopes? It would be madneſs to believe it, eſpecially when we conſider what number of heretics appeared in the very infancy of the church, who all pretended to build their notions on ſcripture, and moſt of them appealed to it as the final judge of controverſies. Now it is certain that theſe different ſects of Chriſtians were a perpetual guard upon each other, and rendered it impoſſible for one party to practiſe thus groſſly on the ſacred books, without the diſcovery and clamour of the reſt.

Nor muſt I omit to obſerve, that in every age, from the apoſtles time to our own, there have been numberleſs quotations made from the books of the New Teſtament; and a multitude of commentaries in various languages, and ſome of very ancient date, have been written upon them; ſo that if the books themſelves were loſt, I believe they might, in a great meaſure, if not entirely, be recovered from the writings of others. And I may venture to ſay, that if all the quotations ever made from all the ancient writings now in Europe were amaſſed together, the bulk of them would by no means be comparable to that of the quotations taken from the New Teſtament alone. So that any man might with much better reaſon diſpute, whether the writings aſcribed to Homer, Demoſthenes, Virgil, or Cæſar, be in the main ſuch as they left them, than he could queſtion it concerning thoſe of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, James, and Paul.

I ſay, in the main, becauſe we readily allow, that the hand of a printer, or of a tranſcriber, might chance, in ſome places, to inſert one letter or word for another; and the various readings of this, as well as all other ancient books, prove, that this has ſometimes been the caſe. But thoſe various readings are generally of ſuch little importance, that he who can urge them as an objection againſt the aſſertion we are now maintaining, muſt have little judgment, or little integrity; and, indeed, after thoſe excellent things which have

have been ſaid on the ſubject by many defenders of Chriſtianity, he muſt, if he has read their writings, have little modeſty too.

Since then it appears that the books of the New Teſtament, as they now ſtand in the original, are, without any material alteration, ſuch as they were when they came from the hands of the ſacred authors, nothing remains to complete this part of the argument, but to ſhew,

5. That the tranſlation of them now in common uſe may be depended upon, as, in all particulars, agreeable to the original.

This is a fact, of which the generality of readers are not able to judge immediately, though it is of the laſt importance: It is therefore with great pleaſure I reflect, how ample evidence they may have another way, to make their minds eaſy on this head. I mean, by the concurrent teſtimony of others, in circumſtances in which it cannot be imagined they would unite to deceive them.

There are few who preach the goſpel of the Son of God, but have examined this matter with the greateſt care, and are able to judge in ſo eaſy a caſe; and who will all with me unanimouſly declare, that the common Engliſh tranſlation is in the main faithful and judicious. We do not, indeed, ſcruple, on ſome occaſion, to animadvert upon it? but theſe remarks never affect the fundamentals of religion, and ſeldom reach any farther than the beauty of a figure, or the connection of an argument.

But the argument does not wholly reſt on the unanimous ſuffrage of the teachers of the goſpel: they cannot themſelves poſſibly deceive in this particular. The different ſects of proteſtants in this kingdom bear witneſs to this truth. For it is certain, that where a body of men diſſent from the public eſtabliſhment, and yet agree with the church from which they diſſent, in uſing the ſame tranſlation, though they are capable of examining and judging of it, is as great evidence as can be deſired, that ſuch a tranſlation is right in the main. But the diſſenters unanimouſly unite with us in bearing teſtimony to the oracles of God, as delivered in our own language; and conſequently our tranſlation may be depended upon.

Thus have I finiſhed the firſt part of my argument, and ſhewn that the Chriſtian religion is certainly true, and that the New Teſtament is genuine. I ſhall next proceed to ſhew,

II. That from allowing the New Teſtament to be genuine, it will undeniably follow, that Chriſtianity is a divine revelation.

And here a perſon is at firſt ready to be loſt in the multiplicity of arguments which ſurround him. It is very eaſy to find proofs; but difficult to range and diſpoſe them in ſuch order as beſt to illuſtrate and confirm each other. I ſhall therefore offer them in the following natural ſeries.

The authors of the books contained in the New Teſtament were certainly capable of judging concerning the truth of the facts they aſſerted: their character, ſo far as we can judge of it by their writings, renders them worthy of regard; and they were under no temptation to attempt impoſing on the world by ſuch a ſtory as they have given us, if it had been falſe. Nevertheleſs, it is certain in fact, that they did gain credit, and ſucceeded in a moſt amazing manner, againſt all oppoſition. It is, therefore, certain that the

facts

facts which they assert were true; and if they were true, then it was reasonable for their contemporaries, and it is reasonable for us, to receive the gospel as a divine revelation: especially if we consider what has happened in the world for the confirmation of it, since first propagated by them. This is the conclusion to which I would lead you; and therefore let us seriously consider each of the steps by which we arrive at it.

It is exceedingly evident, that the writers of the New Testament certainly knew whether the facts they asserted were true or false.

And this they must have known, for this plain reason; because they tell us, they did not trust merely to the report even of persons whom they thought most credible, but were present themselves when several of the most important facts happened; and so received them on the testimony of their own senses. On this St. John, in his first epistle, chap. i. ver. 1, 3. lays a very great and reasonable stress: "That which we have seen with our eyes;" and that not only by a sudden glance, but "which we have *attentively* looked upon, and which *even* our hands have handled of the word of life." i. e. of Christ and his gospel, declare unto you.

Let the common sense of mankind judge here. Did not Matthew and John certainly know whether they had personally, and familiarly, conversed with Jesus of Nazareth, or not? Whether he had chosen them for his constant attendants and apostles? Whether they had seen him heal the sick, dispossess devils, and raise the dead? And whether they themselves had received from him such miraculous endowments, as they say he bestowed upon them? Did not they know whether he fell into the hands of his enemies, and was publickly put to death or not? Did not John know whether he saw him expiring on the cross or not? and whether he received from him a dying charge, which he records, chap. xix. ver. 27? Did he not know whether he saw him wounded in the side with a spear or not? and whether he did, or did not see that effusion of blood and water, which was an infallible argument of his being really dead? Concerning which, it being so material a circumstance, he adds, "He that saw it bare record; and he knoweth that he saith true." i. e. That it was a case in which he could not possibly be deceived. And with regard to Christ's resurrection, did he not certainly know whether he saw our Lord again and again; and whether he handled his body, that he might be sure it was not a mere phantom? what one circumstance of his life could he certainly know, if he were mistaken in this?

Did not Luke know whether he was in the ship with Paul, when that extraordinary wreck happened, by which they were thrown ashore on the island of Malta? did he not know whether, while they were lodged together in the governor's house, Paul miraculously healed one of the family, and many other diseased persons in the island, as he positively asserts that he did in Act xxviii?

Did not Paul certainly know whether Christ appeared to him on the way to Damascus, or not! whether he was blind; and afterwards, on the prayer of a fellow-disciple, received his sight? or, was that a circumstance in which there could be room for mistake? did he not know whether he received such extraordinary revelations and extraordinary powers, as to be able, by the imposition of his hands, or, by the words of his mouth, to work miracles; and even to convey supernatural endowments to others?

To add no more: did not Peter know, whether he saw the glory of Christ's transfiguration, and heard that voice to which he so expressly refers, when he says, "We have not

not followed cunningly deviſed fables, but were eye-witneſſes of his majeſty, when there came ſuch a voice to him; and this voice we heard, 2d Peter, ch. i. 16, 18."

Now Matthew, John, Luke, Paul, and Peter, are by far the moſt conſiderable writers of the New Teſtament; and I am ſure, when you reflect on theſe particulars, you muſt own, that there are few hiſtorians, ancient or modern, that could ſo certainly judge of the truth of the facts which they have related. The reaſon why I have enlarged in ſtating ſo clear a caſe is, that it is the foundation of the whole argument: and that this branch of it alone cuts off Infidels from that refuge which they could generally chuſe, that of pleading the apoſtles were Enthuſiaſts; and leaves them ſilent, unleſs they will ſay that they were impoſtors. For you evidently ſee, that could we ſuppoſe theſe facts to be falſe, they could by no means pretend an involuntary miſtake; but muſt, in the moſt criminal and aggravated ſenſe, as St. Paul himſelf expreſſes it, Cor. xv. 15. "Be found falſe witneſſes of God." But how unreaſonable it would be to charge him with ſo notorious a crime will in part appear, if we conſider,

That the character of theſe writers, ſo far as we can judge by their works, ſeems to render them worthy of regard; and leaves no room to imagine that they intended to deceive us.

It would be unneceſſary to ſhew at large, that they appear to have been perſons of natural ſenſe, and, at the time of their writing, of a compoſed mind: for I verily believe, no man that ever read the New Teſtament with attention, could imagine they were ideots or madmen. Let the diſcourſes of Chriſt in the Evangeliſts, of Peter and Paul in the Acts, as well as many paſſages in the Epiſtles, be peruſed, and I will venture to ſay, he who is not even charmed with them, muſt be a ſtranger to all the juſteſt rules of polite criticiſm. But he who ſuſpects that the writers wanted common ſenſe, muſt himſelf be moſt evidently deſtitute of it: and he who can ſuſpect they might poſſibly be diſtracted, muſt himſelf, in this inſtance at leaſt, be juſt as mad as he imagines them to have been. It was neceſſary, however, juſt to touch upon this; becauſe, unleſs we are ſatisfied that a perſon be himſelf in what he writes, we cannot pretend to determine his character from his writing.

Having premiſed this, let us, peruſing the New Teſtament, obſerve what evident marks it bears of ſimplicity and integrity, of piety and benevolence; upon which we ſhall find them pleading the cauſe of its authors, with a reſtleſs, though gentle eloquence; and powerfully perſuading the mind, that men who were capable of writing ſo excellently well, are not, without the ſtrongeſt evidence, to be ſuſpected of acting ſo deteſtably ill, as we muſt ſuppoſe they did, if in this ſolemn manner they were carrying on an impoſture, in ſuch circumſtances as attended the caſe before us. For,

The manner in which they tell this amazing ſtory, is moſt happily adapted to gain our belief. For as they tell it with a great detail of circumſtances, which by no means could be prudent in legendary writers, becauſe it leaves ſo much the more room for confutation; ſo they alſo do it in the moſt eaſy and natural manner. There is no air of declamation and harangue; nothing that looks like artifice and deſign; no apologies, no encomiums, no characters, no reflections, no digreſſions; but the facts are recounted with great ſimplicity, juſt as they ſeem to have happened; and thoſe facts are left to ſpeak for themſelves in their great author. It is plain, that the reſt of theſe writers, as well as the apoſtle Paul, did not affect excellency of ſpeech, or flights of eloquence, as the phraſe

 ſignifies;

ſignifies; but determined to know nothing, though amongſt the moſt learned and polite, ſave Jeſus Chriſt, and him crucified. A conduct which is the more to be admired, when we conſider how extraordinary a theme theirs was, and with what abundant variety of moſt pathetic declamation, it would eaſily have furniſhed any common writer: ſo that one would really wonder how they could forbear it. But they rightly judged, that a vain affectation of ornament, when recording ſuch a ſtory as of their own knowledge, might perhaps have brought their ſincerity into queſtion; and ſo have rendered the croſs of Chriſt of no effect.

Their integrity likewiſe evidently appears in the freedom with which they mention thoſe circumſtances, which might have expoſed their maſter and themſelves to the greateſt contempt, among prejudiced and inconſiderate men; ſuch as they knew they muſt generally expect to meet with. As to their maſter, they ſcruple not to own, that his country was infamous, his birth and education mean, and his life indigent; that he was moſt diſdainfully rejected by the rulers, and accuſed of ſabbath-breaking, blaſphemy, and ſedition; that he was reviled by the populace as a debauchee, a lunatic, and a demoniac; and at laſt, by the united rage of both rulers and people, was publickly executed as the vileſt of malefactors, with all imaginable circumſtances of ignominy, ſcorn, and abhorrence.

Nor do they ſcruple to own, that terror and diſtreſs of ſpirit into which he was thrown by his ſufferings, though this was a circumſtance at which ſome of the Heathens took the greateſt offence, as utterly worthy ſo excellent and divine a perſon. As to themſelves, the apoſtles readily confeſs not only the meanneſs of their original employment, and the ſcandals of their former life, but their prejudices, their follies, and their faults, after Chriſt had honoured them with ſo holy a calling. They acknowledge their lowneſs of apprehenſion under ſo excellent a teacher; their unbelief, their cowardice, their ambition, their raſh zeal, and their fooliſh contentions. So that, on the whole, they ſeem every where to forget that they are writing of themſelves; and appear not at all ſolicitous about their own reputation; but only that they might repreſent the matter juſt as it was, whether they went through honour or diſhonour, through evil report or good report. Nor is this all; for,

It is certain that in their writings are the moſt genuine traces, not only of a plain and honeſt, but a moſt pious and devout, a moſt benevolent and generous diſpoſition. Theſe appear eſpecially in the epiſtolary parts of the New Teſtament, where, indeed, we ſhould moſt reaſonably expect to find them: and of theſe I may confidently affirm, that the greater progreſs any one has made in love to God, in zeal for his glory, in a compaſſionate and generous concern for the preſent and future happineſs of mankind; the more humble and candid, and temperate and pure he is, the more ardently he loves truth, and the more ſteadily he is determined to ſuffer the greateſt extremity in its defence. In a word, the more his heart is weaned from the preſent world, and the more it is fired with the proſpects of a glorious immortality, the more pleaſure will he take in reading thoſe writings; the more will he reliſh the ſpirit which diſcovers itſelf in them: and find, that as face anſwers face in water, ſo do the traces of divine grace which appear there, anſwer to thoſe which a good man feels in his own ſoul. Nay, I will add, that the warm and genuine workings of that excellent and holy temper, which every where diſcovers itſelf in the New Teſtament, have for many ages been the moſt effectual method of

of firing true believers with a zeal for the honour of the goſpel, and a deſire of framing their converſation as becomes the goſpel of Chriſt.

Where then there are ſuch genuine marks of an excellent character, not only in laboured diſcourſes, but in epiſtolary writings, and thoſe ſometimes addreſſed to particular and intimate friends, to whom the mind naturally opens itſelf with the greateſt freedom, ſurely no candid and equitable judge would lightly believe them to be all counterfeit; or would imagine, without very ſubſtantial proof, that perſons who breathe ſuch exalted ſentiments of God and religion, ſhould be guilty of any notorious wickedneſs; and in proportion to the degree of enormity and aggravation attending ſuch a ſuppoſed crime, it may juſtly be expected, that the evidence of their having really committed it ſhould be unanſwerably ſtrong and convincing.

Now it is very certain, on the principles laid down above, that if the teſtimony of the apoſtles was falſe, they muſt have acted as deteſtable and villainous a part as one can eaſily conceive. To be found, as the apoſtle with his uſual energy expreſſes it, falſe witneſſes of God, in any ſingle inſtance, and ſolemnly declare to have done miraculouſly, what we, in our own conſciences know, was never done at all, would be an audacious degree of impiety, to which none but the moſt abandoned of mankind could arrive. Yet if the teſtimony of the apoſtles was falſe, as we have proved they could not be themſelves miſtaken in it, this muſt have been their caſe; and that not in one ſingle inſtance only, but in a thouſand. Their lives muſt, in effect, be one continued and perpetual ſcene of perjury; and all the moſt ſolemn actions of it, (in which they were ſpeaking to God, or ſpeaking of him as God the father of Chriſt, from whom they received their commiſſion and powers) muſt be a moſt profane and daring inſult on all the acknowledged perfections of his nature.

And the inhumanity of ſuch a conduct would, on the whole, have been equal to its impiety. For it was deceiving men in their moſt important intereſts, and perſuading them to venture their whole future happineſs on the power and fidelity of one whom, on this ſuppoſition, they knew to have been an impoſtor, and juſtly to have ſuffered a capital puniſhment for his crimes. It cannot be ſuppoſed that God who regards the intereſt of his children would long ſuffer ſuch an impoſition to prevail without preventing it by the interpoſition of his wiſdom and power.

It would have been great guilt to have given the hearts and devotions of men ſo wrong a turn, even though they had found magiſtrates ready to eſpouſe and eſtabliſh, yea, and to enfore the religion they taught. But on the contrary, to labour to propagate it in the midſt of the moſt vigorous and ſevere oppoſition from them, muſt equally enhance the guilt and folly of the undertaking. For by this means they made themſelves acceſſary to the ruin of thouſands: and all the calamities which fell on ſuch proſelytes, or even on their remoteſt deſcendants, for the ſake of Chriſtianity, would be in a great meaſure chargeable on theſe firſt preachers of it. The blood of honeſt, yea, (and ſuppoſing them, as you muſt, to have been involuntarily deceived) of pious, worthy, and heroic perſons, who might otherwiſe have been the greateſt bleſſings to the public, would in effect be crying for vengeance againſt them. And the diſtreſſes of the widows and orphans, which thoſe martyrs might leave behind them, would join to ſwell the account.

So

So that, on the whole, the guilt of thoſe malefactors, who are from time to time the victims of public juſtice, even for robbery, murder, or treaſon, is ſmall, when compared with that which we have now been ſuppoſing. And corrupt as human nature is, it appears to be utterly improbable, that twele men ſhould be found, I will not ſay in one little nation, but even on the whole face of the earth, who could be capable of entering into ſo black a confederacy, on any terms whatſoever.

And now, in this view of the caſe, let us make a ſerious pauſe, and compare with it what we have juſt been ſaying of the character of the apoſtles of Jeſus, ſo far as an indifferent perſon could conjecture it from their writings; and then ſay, whether we can in our hearts believe them to have been theſe abandoned wretches, at once the reproach and aſtoniſhment of mankind? would they have ſealed a known falſity with their blood, or bartered their lives for the confirmation of vague notions, or uncertain conjectures? We cannot ſurely believe ſuch things of any, and much leſs of them, unleſs it ſhall appear, they were in ſome peculiar circumſtances of ſtrong temptation; and what thoſe circumſtances could be, it is difficult even for imagination to conceive.

But hiſtory is ſo far from ſuggeſting any unthought-of fact, to help our imagination on this head, that it bears ſtrongly the contrary way. I ſhall now proceed to ſhew,

That they were under no temptation to forge a ſtory of this kind, or to publiſh it to the world, knowing it to be falſe.

They could reaſonably expect no gain, no reputation by it. But, on the contrary, ſuppoſing it an impoſture, they muſt, with the moſt ordinary ſhare of prudence, have foreſeen infamy and ruin, as the certain conſequence of attempting it. For the grand foundation of the ſcheme was, that Jeſus of Nazareth, who was crucified at Jeruſalem by the Jewiſh rulers, was the ſon of God, and the Lord of all things. I appeal to men's conſciences, whether this looks at all like the contrivances of artful and deſigning men.

It was evidently charging upon the princes of their country, the moſt criminal and aggravated murder; indeed, all things conſidered, the moſt enormous act of wickedneſs which the ſun had ever ſeen. They might therefore depend upon it, that theſe rulers would immediately employ all their art and power to confute the teſtimony, and to deſtroy their perſons. Accordingly, one of them was preſently ſtoned, another quickly beheaded; and moſt of the reſt were ſcattered abroad into ſtrange cities (as we learn from the Acts of the Apoſtles) where they were ſure to be received with great prejudices, raiſed againſt them among the Jews by reports from Jeruſalem, and highly ſtrengthened by their expectations of a temporal Meſſiah: Expectations, which, as the apoſtles knew by their own experience, it was exceeding difficult to root out of mens minds: Expectations, which would render the doctrine of Chriſt crucified an inſeparable ſtumbling-block to the Jews.

Nor could they expect a much better reception among the Gentiles, with whom their buſineſs was to perſuade them to renounce the gods of their anceſtors, and to depend on a perſon who had died the death of a malefactor and a ſlave; to perſuade them to forego the pompous idolatries in which they had been educated, and all the ſenſual indulgencies with which their religion (if it might be called a religion) was attended, to worſhip one inviſible God through one Mediator, in the moſt plain and ſimple manner; and to receive

ceive a ſet of precepts, moſt directly calculated to controul and reſtrain, not only the enormities of mens actions, but the irregularities of their hearts.

A moſt difficult undertaking! And to engage them to this, they had no other arguments to bring, but ſuch as were taken from the views of an inviſible ſtate of happineſs or miſery, of which they aſſerted their crucified Jeſus to be ſupreme diſpoſer, who ſhould another day diſpenſe his bleſſing or his vengeance, as the goſpel had been embraced or rejected. Now, could it be imagined, that men would eaſily be perſuaded, merely on the credit of their affirmation, or in compliance with their importunity, to believe things, which, to their prejudiced minds, would appear ſo improbable, and to ſubmit to impoſitions to their corrupt inclinations ſo inſupportable? And if they could not perſuade them to it, what could the apoſtles then expect? What but to be inſulted as fools or madmen by one ſort of people; and by another to be perſecuted with the moſt ſavage and outrageous cruelty, as blaſphemers of the gods, as ſeducers of the people, and diſturbers of the public peace? All which we know happened accordingly. Nay, they aſſure us, that their Lord had often warned them of it; and that they themſelves expected it, and thought it neceſſary to admoniſh their followers to expect it too. And it appears, that far from drawing back, upon that account, as they would ſurely have done, if they had been governed by ſecular motives, they became ſo much the more zealous and outrageous; and animated each other to reſiſt even to blood.

Now as this is a great evidence of the integrity, and piety of their character, and thus illuſtrates the former head, ſo it ſerves to the purpoſe now immediately in view, that is, it proves how improbable it is, that any perſon of common ſenſe ſhould engage in an impoſture, from which, as many have juſtly obſerved, they could, on their own principles, have nothing to expect but ruin in this world, and damnation in the next. When we therefore conſider and compare their character and circumſtances, it appears utterly improbable, on various accounts, that they would have attempted in this article to impoſe upon the world. But, ſuppoſe that, in conſequence of ſome unaccountable, as well as undiſcoverable frenzy, they had ventured on the attempt, it is eaſy to ſhew,

That, humanly ſpeaking, they muſt quickly have periſhed in it; and their fooliſh cauſe muſt have died with them, without ever gaining any credit in the world. Common ſenſe muſt have ſuggeſted to them, that a report of a circumſtance moſt extraordinary in its nature, if not atteſted by the moſt convincing evidence, muſt have expoſed their cauſe as baſe, abſurd, and contemptible.

One may venture to ſay this in general, on the principles which I have before laid down. But it appears ſtill more evident, when we conſider the nature of the fact they aſſerted, in conjunction with the methods they took to engage men to believe it; methods, which, had the apoſtles been impoſtors, muſt have had the moſt direct tendency to ruin both their ſcheme and themſelves.

Let us a little more particularly reflect on the nature of that grand fact, namely, the death, reſurrection, and exaltation of Chriſt; which, as I obſerved, was the great foundation of the Chriſtian ſcheme, as firſt exhibited by the apoſtles. The reſurrection of a dead man, and his aſcenſion into, and abode in the upper world, was ſo ſtrange a thing, that a thouſand objections would immediately be raiſed againſt it: and ſome extraordinary proof would juſtly be required as a balance to them. Now I wiſh that the rejectors of the goſpel would ſet themſelves to invent ſome hypotheſis, which ſhould have any appearance

of probability, to ſhew how ſuch an amazing ſtory ſhould ever gain credit in the world, if it had not ſome very convincing proof. Where and when could it firſt begin to be received? Was it in the ſame, or a ſucceeding age? Was it at Jeruſalem, the ſpot of ground on which it is ſaid to have happened? or in Greece, Italy, Aſia, or Africa? The ſcene and time may be changed, as one pleaſes; but the difficulty cannot.

Take it in a parallel inſtance: ſuppoſe twelve men in London were now to affirm, that a perſon executed there as a malefactor in a public manner, a month, or ſix weeks ago, or if you pleaſe, a year, or five or ten years, ſince, for it is much the ſame, was a prophet ſent from God with extraordinary powers; that he was raiſed from the dead; that they converſed with him after his revival; and at laſt ſaw him taken up into heaven. Would their united teſtimony make them to be believed there? Or ſuppoſe them to diſperſe, and that one or two of them ſhould retire to Northampton, and go on ſtill more diſtant, ſuppoſe Leiceſter, Nottingham, or York, and tell their ſtory there: and that others were to carry it over to Paris, or Amſterdam, or to Vienna or Madrid; could they expect any more credit with us, or with them, or hope for any thing better than to be looked upon as lunatics, and treated as ſuch? And if they ſhould go into other places, and attempt to mend their ſcheme, by ſaying their Maſter was put to death an hundred or two hundred years ago, when there could be no hiſtorical evidence of it diſcovered, and no proof given but their own confident aſſertion: would they remove, or would they not rather increaſe the difficulty? Or would they in any of theſe caſes gain credit by the moſt dextrous tricks of legerdemain, of which you can ſuppoſe them maſters? Eſpecially, if they ſhould undertake, in conſequence of ſuch ſuppoſed facts, to engage men to renounce their religion in which they had been educated; to deny themſelves in their deareſt paſſions and moſt important worldly intereſts; and even probably to hazard their liberties and their lives, in dependence on a future reward, to be received into a place and ſtate, which no man living on the earth had ever ſeen or known? You would readily allow this to be an inſuppoſable caſe: and why ſhould you ſuppoſe it to have happened ſixteen or ſeventeen hundred years ago? You may aſſure yourſelves, that the reaſon and the paſſions of mankind were then as ſtrong as they are now. But let us a little more particularly conſider,

The manner in which the apoſtles undertook to prove the truth of their teſtimony to this fact: and it will evidently appear, that, inſtead of confirming their ſcheme, it muſt have been ſufficient utterly to have overthrown it, had it been itſelf the moſt probable impoſture that the wit of man could ever have contrived. It is evident, they did not merely aſſert, that they had ſeen miracles wrought by this Jeſus, but that he had endowed themſelves with a variety of miraculous powers. And theſe they undertook to diſplay, not in ſuch idle and uſeleſs tricks as ſlight-of-hand might perform; but in ſuch ſolid and important works, as appeared worthy of a divine interpoſition, and intirely ſuperior to human power: reſtoring ſight to the blind, ſoundneſs to lepers, activity to the lame, and, in ſome inſtances, life to the dead. Nor were theſe things undertaken in a corner, in a circle of friends or dependents: nor were they ſaid to be wrought on ſuch as might be ſuſpected of being confederate in the fraud: but they were done often in the public ſtreets, in the ſight of enemies, or the perſons of ſuch as were utter ſtrangers to the apoſtles; but ſometimes well known to neighbours and ſpectators, as having long laboured under thoſe calamities, which, to human ſkill, were utterly incurable. Would impoſtors have made ſuch pretenſions as theſe? Or, if they had, muſt they not immediately have been expoſed and ruined?

Nor

Nor is there any room at all to object, that perhaps the apoſtles might not undertake to do theſe things on the ſpot, but only aſſert that they had done them elſewhere: for even then, it would have been impoſſible that they ſhould have gained credit: and they would have ſeemed the leſs credible, on account of ſuch a pretence. Whatever appearances there might have been of gravity, integrity, and piety, in the converſation of Peter; for inſtance, very few, eſpecially ſuch as had known but little of him, would have taken it upon his word, that he ſaw Jeſus raiſe Lazarus from the dead at Bethany: but fewer yet would have believed it upon his affirmation, had it been ever ſo ſolemn, that he himſelf raiſed Dorcas at Joppa, unleſs he had done ſome extraordinary work before them, correſpondent at leaſt, if not equal to that. One may eaſily think of invincible objections, which otherwiſe might have been made; and undoubtedly the more ſuch aſſertions had been multiplied, every new perſon, ſcene, and fact, had been an additional advantage given to the enemy, to have detected and confuted the whole ſcheme, which Peter and his aſſociates had thus endeavoured to eſtabliſh.

But to come ſtill cloſer to the point; If the New Teſtament be genuine, as I have already proved it, then it is certain, that the apoſtles pretend to have wrought miracles in the very preſence of thoſe, to whom their writings were addreſſed; nay, more, they profeſs likewiſe to have conferred thoſe miraculous gifts in ſome conſiderable degrees on others, even on the very perſons to whom they write; and they appeal to their conſciences with regard to the truth of it. And could there poſſibly be room for deluſion here? It is exceeding remarkable to this purpoſe, that Paul makes this appeal to the Corinthians, and to the Galatians, when, amongſt them, were ſome perſons diſaffected to him, who were taking all opportunities to ſink his character and deſtroy his influence. And could they have wiſhed for a better opportunity than ſuch an appeal? An appeal, which, had not the fact it ſuppoſed been certain, far from recovering thoſe that were wavering in their eſteem, muſt have been ſufficient utterly to diſguſt his moſt cordial and ſteady friends. The ſame remark may be applied to the advices and reproofs, which the apoſtle there gives, relating to the uſe and abuſe of their ſpiritual gifts: which had been moſt notoriouſly abſurd, and even ridiculous, had not the Chriſtians, to whom he wrote, been really poſſeſſed of them. And theſe gifts were ſo plainly ſupernatural, that as it had been often obſerved, if it be allowed, that miracles can prove a divine revelation, and that the firſt Epiſtle to the Corinthians be genuine (of which, by the way, there is at leaſt as pregnant evidences, as that any part of the New Teſtament is ſo) then it follows, by a ſure and eaſy conſequence, that Chriſtianity is true. Nevertheleſs, other arguments are not to be forgot in this ſurvey. And therefore, as I have proved, that, had the teſtimony of the apoſtles been falſe, it is not to be imagined, that they could have gained credit at all; eſpecially when they had put the proof of their cauſe on ſuch a footing, as we are ſure they did; I ſhall now ſhew,

That it is a certain fact, the apoſtles did gain early credit, and ſucceeded in a moſt wonderful manner; from whence it will follow, that their teſtimony was true.

That the apoſtles did, indeed, gain credit in the world, is evident from what I before offered, in order to prove the early prevalence of Chriſtianity in it, and this may be farther confirmed from many paſſages in the New Teſtament. And here I inſiſt not ſo much on expreſs hiſtorical teſtimonies, though ſome of them are very remarkable; eſpecially that of the brethren at Jeruſalem, who ſpeak of many myriads of believing

Jews

Jews aſſembled at the feaſt of Pentecoſt, mentioned in chap. xxi. of the Acts. But I argue from the Epiſtles written to ſeveral churches, which plainly prove, that there were congregations of Chriſtians in Rome, Corinth, Epheſus, Coloſſe, Theſſalonica, Philippa, Laodicea, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Crete, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Aſia, Bythinia, and many other places: Inſomuch, that one of the apoſtles could ſay, "That Chriſt had ſo wrought by him to make the Gentiles obedient, *not only* in word *or profeſſion*, *but* in deed *too*; that from Jeruſalem, even round about unto Illyrium, he had fully preached the goſpel of Chriſt:" or as the word imports, "had accompliſhed," the purpoſes of it. And there is a great deal of reaſon, both from the nature of the thing, and from the teſtimony of ancient hiſtory, to believe, that others of the apoſtles had conſiderable ſucceſs elſewhere. So that St. Paul might with reaſon apply to them and their doctrine, what is originally ſpoken of the luminaries of heaven, and the inſtruction they communicate, "their ſound is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."

So great was the number of thoſe who were made proſelytes to Chriſtianity by the preaching of the apoſtles. And we have all imaginable reaſon to believe, that there were none of all thoſe proſelytes, but what were fully perſuaded of the truth of the teſtimony they bore; for otherwiſe no imaginable reaſon can be given for their entering themſelves into ſuch a profeſſion. The apoſtles had no ſecular terrors to affright their proſelytes; no ſecular rewards to bribe them; no dazzling eloquence to enchant them; on the contrary, all theſe were in a powerful manner pleading againſt the apoſtles; yet their teſtimony was received, and their new converts were ſo thoroughly ſatisfied with the evidence which they gave them of their miſſion, that they encountered great perſecutions, and chearfully ventured eſtate, liberty, and life itſelf on the truth of the facts they aſſerted; as plainly appears from the many paſſages in the epiſtles, which none can think the apoſtles would ever have writ, if thoſe firſt Chriſtians had not been in a perſecuted condition.

Nor will it ſignify any thing to object, that moſt of theſe converts were perſons of a low rank and ordinary education, who therefore might be more eaſily impoſed upon than others. For not to mention Sergius Paulius, Dionyſius the Areopagite, or the domeſtics of Cæſar's houſhold, (with others of ſuperior ſtation in life) it is ſufficient to call to mind, that the apoſtles did not put their cauſe on the iſſue of laboured arguments, in which the populace might quickly have been entangled and loſt; but on ſuch plain facts as they might judge of as eaſily and ſurely as any others; indeed, on what they themſelves ſaw, and in part, too, on what they felt.

Now I apprehend this might be ſufficient to bring the matter to a ſatisfactory concluſion. It has been ſhewn, that as there is no reaſon to believe, that the apoſtles who certainly knew the truth, would have attempted a fraud of this kind—ſo if they had attempted it, they could not poſſibly have ſucceeded: nevertheleſs they did ſucceed in a very remarkable manner. Whence it plainly follows, that what they teſtified was true.

Admitting the facts which they teſtified concerning Chriſt to be true, then it was reaſonable for their co-temporaries, and is reaſonable for us to receive the Goſpel, which they have tranſmitted to us as a divine revelation.

The great things they aſſerted were, that Jeſus was the Chriſt; and that he was proved to be ſo, by prophecies accompliſhed in him, and by miracles wrought by him, and by others

others in his name. Let us attend to each of these, and I am perſuaded that we ſhall find them no contemptible arguments; but muſt be forced to acknowledge, that the premiſes being eſtabliſhed, the concluſion moſt eaſily and neceſſarily follows. And this concluſion, "that Jeſus is the Chriſt," taken in all its extent, is an abſtract of the Goſpel revelation; and therefore is ſometimes put for the whole of it.

The apoſtles, eſpecially when diſputing with the Jews, frequently argued from the prophecies of the Old Teſtament, in which they ſay many things were expreſſly foretold, which were moſt literally and exactly fulfilled in Jeſus of Nazareth. Now, greatly to the evidence, confirmation, and advantage of Chriſtianity, ſo it is theſe prophecies are to this day extant in the original language; and this is in the hands of a people moſt implacably averſe to the goſpel. So that an attentive reader may ſtill, in a great meaſure, ſatisfy himſelf as to the validity of the argument drawn from them.

On ſearching theſe ancient and important records, we find not only in general, that God intended to raiſe up for his people an illuſtrious deliverer, who, among other glorious titles, is ſometimes called the Meſſiah, or the Anointed One: But we are more particularly told, that this great event ſhould happen before the government ceaſed in the tribe of Judah, while the ſecond temple was ſtanding; and a little before its deſtruction, about four hundred and ninety years after a command given to rebuild Jeruſalem; which was probably iſſued out in the ſeventh year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, or at leaſt within a a few years before, or after it. It is predicted that he ſhould be of the ſeed of Abraham, born of a virgin, of the houſe of David in the town of Bethlehem; that he ſhould be anointed with an extraordinary effuſion of the divine Spirit; in virtue of which he ſhould not only be a perfect and illuſtrious example of univerſal holineſs and goodneſs, but ſhould alſo perform many extraordinary and beneficial miracles. Nevertheleſs, that for want of external pomp and ſplendor, he ſhould be rejected and inſulted by the Jews, and afterwards be cut off and ſlain by them. It is added, that he ſhould ariſe from the dead, before his body ſhould be corrupted in the grave, and ſhould be received up to heaven, and there ſeated at the right hand of God: from whence he ſhould, in a wonderful manner, pour out his ſpirit on his followers; in conſequence of which, though the body of the Jewiſh people periſhed in their obſtinate oppoſition to him, yet the Gentiles ſhould be brought to the knowledge of the true God, and a kingdom eſtabliſhed amongſt them, which, from ſmall beginnings, ſhould ſpread itſelf to the end of the earth, and continue to the remoteſt ages.

Beſides theſe moſt material circumſtances, there were ſeveral others relating to him, which were either expreſſly foretold, or at leaſt hinted at: all which, with thoſe already mentioned, had ſo evident an accompliſhment in Jeſus (allowing the truth of the facts which the apoſtles teſtified concerning him) that we have no reaſon to wonder that they ſhould receive the word with all readineſs who ſearched the ſcriptures daily, whether theſe things were ſo predicted there, as the apoſtles affirmed. For I am perſuaded that no wiſe and religious perſon could imagine, that God would permit an impoſtor to ariſe, in whom ſo great a variety of predictions delivered by ſo many different perſons, and in ſo many diſtant ages, ſhould have an exact accompliſhment.

When the apoſtles were preaching to heathens, it is indeed true, that they generally waved the argument from prophecy, becauſe they were not capable judges of it. But when they inſiſt on another, which might as ſoon captivate their belief, and as juſtly vindicate; I mean "the miracles performed by Chriſt, and thoſe commiſſioned and influenced by him;" many of theſe were of ſuch a nature, as not to admit of any artifice or deceit: eſpecially that moſt ſignal one of his reſurrection from the dead, which I may call a miracle performed by, as well as upon Chriſt; becauſe he ſo expreſſly declares, that he had himſelf a power to reſume his life, at pleaſure. The apoſtles well knew, that this was a fact of ſuch a nature, that thoſe who believed this, would never doubt of the reſt. They often therefore ſingle this out and lay the whole ſtreſs of their cauſe upon it. This they proved to be true by their own teſtimony miraculouſly confirmed: and in proving this, they eſtabliſhed Chriſtianity on an impregnable rock. For I may ſafely refer it to any judge, whether it is an imaginable thing that God ſhould raiſe the dead body of an impoſtor, eſpecially when he had ſolemnly appealed to ſuch a reſurrection, as a grand proof of his miſſion, and had expreſſly fixed the very day on which it was to happen.

I perſuade myſelf, that by all this it is evident, that thoſe, who, on the apoſtle's teſtimony believed, that the prophecies of the Old Teſtament were accompliſhed in Jeſus, and that God bore witneſs to him by miracles, and raiſed him from the dead, had abundant reaſon to believe, that the doctrine which Chriſt taught was divine, and his goſpel a relation from heaven. And if they had reaſon to admit this concluſion, then it is plain that we, who have ſuch ſatisfactory evidences, on the one hand, that the teſtimony of the apoſtles was credible, and on the other, that this was the ſubſtance of it, have reaſon alſo to admit this grand inference from it, and embrace the goſpel as a faithful ſaying, and well worthy of acceptation. This is the thing I have attempted to prove; and here I ſhould finiſh the argument, were it not for the confirmation it may receive from ſome additional conſiderations, which could not properly be introduced, under any of the preceding heads.

I therefore add, in the laſt place, That the truth of the goſpel has received farther and very conſiderable confirmation, from what has happened in the world ſince it was firſt publiſhed.

And here I muſt deſire the reader to conſider, on the one hand, what God has been doing to eſtabliſh it; and on the other, the methods which its enemies have been taking to deſtroy it.

1. Conſider, what God has been doing to confirm the goſpel, ſince its firſt publication? And I will venture to aſſert, that it will prove a farther evidence of its divine original.

I might here argue at large, from its ſuprizing propagation in the world:—from the miraculous powers with which not only the apoſtles, but ſucceeding preachers of the goſpel, and other converts, were endowed;—from the accompliſhment of the prophecies recorded in the Old Teſtament;—and from the preſervation of the Jews as a diſtinct people, notwithſtanding the various difficulties and perſecutions through which they have paſſed.

I might particularly urge, in confirmation of the truth of Chriſtianity, the wonderful ſucceſs with which it was attended, and the ſurprizing propagation of the goſpel in the world.

I have therefore endeavoured, under a former head, to ſhew you, that the goſpel met with ſo favourable a reception in the world, as evidently proved, that its firſt publiſhers were capable of producing ſufficient evidence of its truth; evidence abſolutely incompatible with impoſture. But I ſhall now carry this remark farther, and aſſert, that, conſidering the circumſtances of the caſe, it is amazing, that even truth itſelf, under ſo many diſadvantages, ſhould have ſo illuſtrious a triumph; and that its wonderful ſucceſs ſo evidently proves ſuch an extraordinary interpoſition of the Almighty in its favour, as may juſtly be called a miraculous atteſtation of it.

There was not only *one of a family*, or *two of a city, taken and brought to Zion*; but *the Lord ſo haſtened it, in its appointed time*, that *a little one became a thouſand, and a ſmall one a ſtrong nation*. And as the apoſtles themſelves were honoured with a very remarkable ſucceſs, ſo this divine ſeed was propagated ſo faſt in the next age, that Pliny teſtifies, "He found the heathen temples in Achaia almoſt deſerted:" and Tertullian afterwards boaſts, "That all places, except thoſe temples, were filled with Chriſtians; ſo that, were they only to withdraw, cities and provinces would be depopulated." Nor did the goſpel only triumph thus within the boundaries of the Roman empire; for long before Tertullian was born, Juſtin Martyr, in his dialogue with Trypho the Jew, which ſeems to have been written not much above an hundred years after Chriſt's death, declares, "That there was "no nation of men, whether Greeks or Barbarians, not excepting theſe ſavages that "wandered in clans from one region to another, and had no fixed habitation, who had not "learned to offer prayers and thankſgivings to the Father and Maker of all, in the name "of Jeſus who was crucified."

Now, how is it poſſible to account for ſuch a ſcene as this, but by ſaying the hand of the Lord was with the firſt preachers of the goſpel, aud therefore ſuch multitudes believed, and turned to the Lord? How was it poſſible for ſo ſmall a fountain to have ſwelled immediately into a mighty river, and even have covered the face of the whole earth, if it had not ſprung from the ſanctuary of God, and been rendered triumphant by his Almighty arm.

Had this new religion, ſo directly contrary to all the prejudices of education, been contrived to ſooth mens vices, to countenance their errors, to defend their ſuperſtitions, or to promote their ſecular intereſts, we might eaſily have accounted for its prevalence in the world. Had its preachers been profound philoſophers, or polite and faſhionable orators, many might have been charmed, at leaſt for a while, to follow them: or had the princes and potentates of the earth declared themſelves its patrons, and armed their legions for its defence and propagation, multitudes might have been terrified into the profeſſion, though not a ſoul could by ſuch means have been rationally perſuaded to the uſe of it. But without ſome ſuch advantages as theſe we can hardly conceive, how any new religion ſhould ſo ſtrangely prevail, even though it had crept into the world in its darkeſt ages, and the moſt barbarous countries; and though it had been gradually propoſed in the moſt artful manner, with the fineſt veil, induſtriouſly drawn over every part, which might at firſt have given diſguſt to the beholder.

But

But every one knows that the very reverſe of all this was the cauſe of Chriſtianity. It is abundantly evident, from the apparent conſtitution of the religion of Jeſus, that the luſts and errors, the ſuperſtitions and intereſts of carnal men would immediately riſe up againſt it as a moſt irreconcileable enemy. It is known that the learning and wit of the Greeks and Romans were early employed to ridicule and obſtruct its progreſs. It is known, that as all the herd of heathen deities were to be diſcarded, the prieſts, who ſubſiſted by the ſuperſtitious worſhip paid them, muſt, in intereſt, find themſelves obliged to oppoſe it. It is known that the princes of the earth drew the ſword againſt it, and armed torments and death for the deſtruction of its followers. And yet it triumphed over all, though publiſhed in ages and places celebrated for learning and elegance; and propoſed, not in an ornamental and artificial manner, but with the utmoſt plainneſs, the doctrines of the croſs being always advanced as its grand fundamental, though ſo notorious a ſtumbling-block both to the Jews and Gentiles; and the abſolute neceſſity, not only of embracing Chriſtianity, but alſo of renouncing all idol worſhip being inſiſted on immediately and in the ſtrongeſt terms, though it muſt make the goſpel appear the moſt ſingular and unſociable religion that had ever been taught in the world.

Had one of the wits or politicians of theſe ages ſeen the apoſtles, and a few other plain men, who had been educated among the loweſt of the people, as moſt of the firſt teachers of Chriſtianity were, going out armed with nothing but faith, truth, and goodneſs, to encounter the power of princes, the bigotry of prieſts, the learning of philoſophers, the rage of the populace, and the prejudices of all; How would he have derided the attempt, and ſaid with Sanballat, *What will theſe feeble Jews do?* But had he ſeen the event, ſurely he muſt have owned, with the the Egyptian Magi, in a far leſs illuſtrious miracle, that it was the finger of God, and might juſtly have fallen on his face, even among thoſe whom he had inſulted, with an humble acknowledgment *that God was in them of a truth.*

I might here farther urge thoſe miracles which were wrought in confirmation of the Chriſtian doctrine, for a conſiderable time after the death of the apoſtles.

The moſt ſignal and beſt atteſted among theſe was the diſpoſſeſſing of devils, whom God ſeems to have permitted to rage with unuſual violence about thoſe times, that his Son's triumph over them might be ſo much the more remarkable; and that the old ſerpent might be taken in his own craftineſs. It is well known, that more than two hundred years after the death of Chriſt, ſome of the moſt celebrated defenders of the goſpel, which the church has in any age produced, I mean Tertullian and Minutius Felix, do not only challenge any of the heathen enemies and perſecutors, to bring them a demoniac, engaging at the hazard of their lives to oblige the evil ſpirit, in the name and by the authority of Chriſt, to quit his poſſeſſion; but they do alſo appeal to it as a fact publicly known, that thoſe who were agitated by ſuch ſpirits, ſtood terrified and amazed in the preſence of a Chriſtian; and that their pretended gods were compelled then to confeſs themſelves devils.

I wave the teſtimonies of ſome later writers in the Chriſtian church, leſt the credulity of their temper, joined with the circumſtances attending ſome of the facts they record, ſhould furniſh out objections againſt their teſtimony. Though I think we cannot, without great injuſtice to the character of the learned and pious Auguſtin, ſuſpect the truth of ſome amazing facts of this kind, which he has atteſted of his own perſonal and certain knowledge.

Nor

Not muſt I forget to mention the accompliſhment of ſeveral prophecies, recorded in the New Teſtament, as a further confirmation given by God to the Goſpel.

The moſt eminent and ſignal inſtance under this head, is that of our Lord's prediction concerning the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, as recorded by St. Matthew, in his twenty-fourth chapter. The tragical hiſtory of it is moſt circumſtantially deſcribed by Joſephus, a Jewiſh prieſt, who was an eye-witneſs of it; and the deſcription which he has given of this ſad calamity ſo exactly correſponds with the prophecy, that one would have thought, had we not known the contrary, that it had been written by a Chriſtian, on purpoſe to illuſtrate it. And one can never enough admire that ſeries of amazing providences, by which the author was preſerved from moſt imminent danger, that he might leave us that invaluable treaſure which his writings contain.

We have no need of further evidence than we find in him, of the exact accompliſhment of what was propheſied concerning the deſtruction of Jeruſalem. But our Lord had alſo foretold the long continued deſolation of the temple. And I cannot forbear mentioning the awful ſanction which was given to that part of the prediction. For it is well known, a heathen hiſtorian has aſſured us, that when Julian the apoſtate, in deliberate contempt of that prediction, ſolemnly and reſolutely undertoook to rebuild it, his impious deſign was fruſtrated miraculouſly, again and again; and the workmen conſumed by globes of fire, which broke out from the foundations.

The predictions of St. Paul, concerning the man of ſin, and the apoſtacy of the latter times, is alſo well worthy of our remark; and though a great deal of the book of Revelation be ſtill concealed under a dark veil, yet the diviſion of the Roman empire into ten kingdoms; the uſurpation, perſecution, and idolatry of the Romiſh church, and the long duration of the papal power, with ſeveral other extraordinary events, which no human prudence could have foreſeen, and which have happened long ſince the publication of that book, are ſo clearly foretold there, that I cannot but look on that part of ſcripture as an invaluable treaſure: and I think it not at all improbable, that the more viſible accompliſhment of ſome of its other prophecies, may be a great means of reviving the Chriſtian cauſe, which is at preſent ſo much on the decline.

The preſervation of the Jews, as a diſtinct people, is another particular, under this head, which well deſerves our attentive regard.

'Tis plain that they are very numerous, notwithſtanding all the ſlaughter and deſtruction of them in former and latter ages. They are diſperſed among various moſt diſtant nations, and particularly in theſe parts of the world, where Chriſtianity is profeſſed; and though they are expoſed to great hatred and contempt, on account of their different faith, and in moſt places ſubjected to civil incapacities, if not to unchriſtian ſeverities; yet they are ſtill moſt obſtinately tenacious of their religion: which is the more wonderful, as their fathers were ſo prone to apoſtatize from it; and as moſt of them ſeem to be utter ſtrangers intirely, to piety or humanity, and pour the greateſt contempt on the moral precepts of their own law, while they are ſo attached to the ceremonial inſtitutions of it, troubleſome and inconvenient as they are. Now let us ſeriouſly reflect, what an evident hand of Providence is here, that by their diſperſion, preſervation, and adherence to their religion, it ſhould come to paſs, that Chriſtians ſhould daily ſee the accompliſhment of many re-

markable prophecies, concerning this people; and that we ſhould always have amongſt us ſuch a crowd of unexceptionable witneſſes to the truth of thoſe ancient Hebrew records, on which ſo much of the evidence of the goſpel depends: records which are many of them ſo full to the purpoſe for which we alledge them, that, as a celebrated writer very well obſerves, "Had the whole body of the Jewiſh nation been converted to Chriſtianity, men would certainly have thought they had been forged by Chriſtians; and have looked upon them in the ſame ſight with the prophecies of the Sybils, as made many years after the events which they pretend to foretel."

And to add no more here, the preſervation of the Jews, as a diſtinct people, evidently leaves room for the accompliſhment of thoſe Old and New Teſtament prophecies, which relate to their national converſion and reſtoration: whereas that would be impoſſible in itſelf, or at leaſt impoſſible to be known, if they were promiſcuouſly blended with other people. On the whole, 'tis ſuch a ſcene in the conduct of Providence, as I am well aſſured, cannot be paralleled in the hiſtory of any other nation upon earth: and affords a moſt obvious and important argument, in favour of the goſpel.

Thus has Chriſtianity been farther confirmed ſince its publication, by what God has done to eſtabliſh it. It only remains that we conſider,

2. What confirmation it receives from the methods which its enemies have taken to deſtroy it.

And theſe have generally been, either perſecution, or falſhood, or cavilling at ſome particulars in the revelation, without entering into the grand argument on which it is built, and fairly debating what is offered in its defence. Now, who would not think the better of a cauſe for being thus attacked?

At firſt it is known, that the profeſſors, and eſpecially the preachers of the goſpel, were ſeverely perſecuted. In every city, bond and impriſonment awaited them. As ſoon as ever the apoſtles began to preach Jeſus and his reſurrection, the Jewiſh rulers laid hold on them; and having confined and ſcourged them, ſtrictly prohibited their ſpeaking any more in that name. A little while after Stephen was murdered; and afterwards James and ſome other of the apoſtles. Now certainly ſuch a conduct evidently betrayed a conſciouſneſs that they were not able to anſwer the apoſtles, and to ſupport their own cauſe by the fair methods of reaſon and argument, to which, ſo far as the hiſtory informs us, they made no pretence: but attempted to bear them down by dint of authority, and to ſilence them by brutal force.

It would be endleſs to attempt ſhewing particularly how theſe unrighteous methods were purſued in ſucceeding ages and diſtant countries. The ſavage cruelties of Nero to theſe innocent and holy men were ſuch as raiſed the pity even of their enemies. Yet this was one of the leaſt extenſive and deſtructive of the ten general perſecutions, which aroſe in the Roman empire, beſides ſeveral others in the neighbouring countries, of which eccleſiaſtical hiſtory informs us.

Theſe early enemies of the goſpel added falſhood and ſlander to their inhumanities. They endeavoured to murder the reputations of Chriſtians, as well as their perſons; and were not aſhamed to repreſent them as haters of the whole human ſpecies, for no imagin-

able

able reaſon, but that they would not aſſociate themſelves in their idolatrous worſhip: but with regard to charity and truth, were ſtrongly bearing teſtimony again it. Nay, they charged them with human ſacrifices, inceſt, idolatry, and all the crimes, for which themſelves, and their fooliſh gods, were indeed juſtly deteſtable: but from which the Chriſtians knew how to vindicate themſelves, highly to their own honour, and the everlaſting reproach of theſe malignant and peſtilent accuſers. And they have not failed to do it in many noble apologies, which, through the Divine Providence, are tranſmitted to us, and are incomparably the moſt valuable of any ancient uninſpired writings.

Such were the infamous, the ſcandalous methods, by which the goſpel was oppoſed in the earlieſt ages of the church; and I cannot forbear adding, that the meaſures more lately taken to ſubvert it, eſpecially among ourſelves, ſeem to me rather to reflect a glory on it. The unhappy enemies of the goſpel of the Son of God have been told again and again, that we put the proof of it on plain fact. They themſelves do not, and cannot deny, that it prevailed early in the world, as we have ſhewn at large. There muſt have been ſome man or body of men who firſt introduced it: they generally confeſs, that Chriſt and his apoſtles were the perſons, and theſe apoſtles, on whoſe teſtimony what we know of Chriſt chiefly depended, muſt have been enthuſiaſts or impoſtors, if their teſtimony was falſe.

Now which of theſe ſchemes will the unbelievers take? It ſeems, that the deiſts of the preſent age fix on neither, as being ſecretly conſcious they can ſupport neither; but they content themſelves with cavilling at ſome circumſtances attending the revelation, without daring to encounter its grand evidence; that is, they have been laborioufly attempting to prove it to be improbable, or abſurd, to ſuppoſe that to have been, which nevertheleſs plainly appears to have been facts. One of them moſt weakly and ſophiſtically attempts to prove, in defiance of the common ſenſe of mankind, that *the light of nature is a perfect rule*; and therefore, that all revelation is needleſs and indeed impoſſible. Another diſguiſes the miracles of Chriſt by falſe and fooliſh repreſentations of them, and then ridicules them as idle tales. A third takes a great deal of fruitleſs pains to ſhew, that ſome prophecies, referred to in the New Teſtament, are capable of another ſenſe, different from that in which the apoſtles have taken them.

The things have been ſet in a very artful and fallacious light by perſons, whoſe names will, perhaps, be tranſmitted to poſterity, with the infamous glory of having been leaders in the cauſe of infidelity; but not a man of them undertakes to aſcertain the grand fact. Nay, they generally take no more notice of the poſitive evidences by which it is even demonſtrated, than if they had never heard it propoſed; though they cavil at incidental paſſages in thoſe books in which it is moſt clearly ſtated. And as for what they have urged, though, perhaps, ſome who were before weary of Chriſtianity may have taken occaſion to reject it, and others, for want of conſulting the anſwers to them, may have been unwarily enſnared; yet the examination of theſe points has been greatly for the honour and vindication of the truth, which ſeems on this occaſion to have been ſet in a clearer and ſtronger light than ever, at leaſt in theſe latter ages.

The cauſe of Chriſtianity has greatly gained by debate, and the goſpel comes like fine gold out of the furnace, which the more it is tried, the more it is approved. I own, the defenders of the goſpel have appeared with very different degrees of abilities for the work; nor could it be otherwiſe among ſuch numbers of them: but on the whole, though the patrons

trons of infidelity have been masters of some wit, humour, and address, as well as of a moderate share of learning, and generally much more than a moderate share of assurance; yet so great is the force of truth, that (unless we may except those writers who have unhappily called for the aid of the civil magistrate in the controversy) I cannot recollect to have seen any defence of the gospel, which has not, on the whole, been sufficient to establish it, notwithstanding all the sophistical arguments of its subtle antagonists.

This is an observation that is continually gaining new strength, as new assaults are made upon the gospel; and I cannot forbear saying, that, as if it were by a kind of judicial infatuation, some who have distinguished themselves in the wretched cause of infidelity, have been permitted to fall into such gross misrepresentations, such senseless inconsistencies, such palpable falshoods, and, in a word, into such various and malignant *superfluity of naughtiness*, that, to a wise and pious mind, they must appear like those venomous creatures, which are said to carry an antidote in their own objections, particularly Lord Bolingbroke, who has given up several of the deistical objections, and even acknowledged the divine original of the gospel; for he asserts, "That no religion ever appeared in the "world, whose natural tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness "of mankind," vol. iv. page 211, 282. He declares, that "No system can be more "simple and plain than that of a natural religion as it stands in the gospel," vol. iv. p. 290, 292. He avers, that "he will not say, that the belief that Jesus was the Messiah, "is the only article of belief necessary to make men Christians. There are other things "doubtless contained in the revelation he made of himself, dependent on, and relative to "this article, without the belief of which, I suppose our charity would be very defective. But this I say, that the system of religion which Christ published, and his evangelists recorded, is a compleat system to all the purposes of religion, natural and revealed. It contains all the duties of the former, it inforces the whole law of faith, by "promising rewards and threatening punishments, which he declares he will distribute "when he comes to judge the world," vol. iv. p. 314. He alloweth, that "the gospel "is, in all cases, one continued lesson of the strictest morality, of justice, of benevolence, and of universal charity, vol. iv. p. 188. He professeth a great concern for true charity, in opposition to theology, and says, that, "genuine Christianity was taught "of God," ibid. p. 349. And not to multiply passages to this purpose, he pronounces, that, "the Christian system of faith and practice was revealed by God himself, and it is "absurd and impious to assert, that the divine Logos revealed it incompletely or imperfectly. Its simplicity and plainness shewed, that it was designed to be the religion of "mankind, and also manifested the divinity of its original," vol. iii. p. 451. After reading these quotations, and a great variety of others, which might be produced from his Lordship's writings, the reader may easily judge what religion has to fear from this noble writer's arguments, if his whole works are read with attention; and I will venture to assert, that he has himself entirely answered his own objections.

Thus have I given the reader a brief view of the chief argument, in proof of Christianity: and the sum of the whole is this;

The gospel is probable in theory; as considering the nature of God, and the circumstances of mankind, there was reason to hope a revelation might be given; and if any were given, we should naturally apprehend its internal evidence would be such as that of the gospel is, and its external such as it is said to be. But it is also true in fact: for

Christianity

Chriſtianity was early profeſſed, as it was firſt introduced by Jeſus of Nazareth, whoſe life and doctrine were publiſhed by his immediate attendants; whoſe books are ſtill preſerved in the original language, and in the main are faithfully tranſlated into our own; ſo that the books of the New Teſtament now in uſe may be depended upon as written by the perſons whoſe names they bear, and admitting this, the truth of the goſpel follows by a train of very eaſy conſequences: for the authors certainly knew the truth of the facts they relate; and conſidering what appears in their character and circumſtances, we can never believe they would have attempted to deceive us; or if they had, they could not have gained credit in the world; but they did gain it in a very remarkable manner; therefore the facts they atteſted are true, and the truth of the goſpel evidently follows from the certainty of thoſe facts, and is generally confirmed by what has happened in the world ſince the publication of it.

This is the ſum of what I flatter myſelf I have ſufficiently proved; and ſhall now conclude what I have to ſay on this ſubject, with a few words by way of reflection.

1. Let us gratefully acknowledge the divine goodneſs, in favouring us with ſo excellent a revelation, and confirming it to us by ſuch ample evidence.

We ſhould daily adore the God of nature, for lighting up the ſun, that glorious, though imperfect image of his own unapproachable luſtre; and appointing it to gild the earth with the various rays, to chear us with its benign influences, and to guide and direct us in our journies, and our labours. But how incomparably more valuable is that *day-ſpring from on high, which hath viſited us, to give light to them that ſit in darkneſs, and in the ſhadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace?* Oh! Chriſtians, for I now addreſs myſelf to you, whoſe eyes are ſo happy to ſee, and your ears to hear, what reaſon have you for daily and hourly praiſe? When your minds are delighted with contemplating the riches of goſpel grace, when you view with wonder and joy the harmonious contrivance of our redemption, when you feel the burthen of your guilt removed, the freedom of your addreſs to the throne of Grace encouraged, and ſee the proſpect of a fair inheritance to eternal glory opening upon you; then in the pleaſing tranſports of your ſouls, borrow the joyful anthem of the pſalmiſt, and ſay, with the humbleſt gratitude and ſelf-reſignation, *God is the Lord who ſheweth us light; bind the ſacrifice with cords, even to the horns of the altar.* Adore *God, who firſt commanded the light to ſhine out of darkneſs,* that by the diſcoveries of his word and the operations of his ſpirit, he hath *ſhined in your hearts to give you the knowledge of his glory, as reflected from the face of his Son.* Let all adore him that this revelation hath reached us, who live in an age and country ſo diſtant from that in which it firſt appeared; while there are to this very day, not only dark corners, but regions of the earth, that *are full of the habitations of idolatry and cruelty.*

Let me peculiarly addreſs myſelf to thoſe whoſe education and circumſtances of life have given them opportunities of a fuller enquiry into the ſtate of thoſe ancient or modern nations, that have been left merely to the light of unaſſiſted reaſon; even to thoſe who are acquainted with the hiſtory of their gods, the rites of their prieſts, the tales, and even the hymns of their poets, thoſe beautiful trifles; nay, I will add, the reaſoning of the ſageſt philoſophers; all the precious, and all the erroneous things they have ſaid where religion and immorality are concerned. I have ſometimes thought that God gave to ſome of the moſt celebrated pagan writers that uncommon ſhare of genius and eloquence, that

they might, as it were, by their art, embalm the monſters of antiquity; that ſo ſucceeding ages might ſee, in a more affecting view than we could otherwiſe have done, how weak the human mind is in its beſt eſtate, and the need which the greateſt, as well as the meaneſt of mankind have, of being taught by a revelation from above. Permit me to remind you, that, while you are daily converſing with ſuch monuments as theſe, and are alſo ſurveying the evidences of Chriſtianity, in a large and more diſtinct view than it was poſſible for me here to ſuppoſe them, you are under peculiar obligations to be very thankful for the goſpel yourſelf, as well as to compaſſionate the cauſe of thoſe to whom it has never been offered, or by whom it is ſlighted. And this leads me to another reflection.

2. What reaſon have we to pity thoſe who reject this glorious goſpel, even when they have opportunities of inquiring into its cleareſt evidences?

Such undoubtedly we have in our own age and nation: and ſurely we ſhould ſometimes beſtow a compaſſionate thought upon them, and lift up humble prayers for them, that God, peradventure, may give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, that they may recover themſelves out of the ſnare of the devil, who are now led captive by him at his pleaſure; we ſhould pity Heathens and Mahometans under their darkneſs and errors; but how much more deplorable is the caſe of theſe, who, though they dwell in Emanuel's land, and in the valley of viſion, turn it into the valley of the ſhadow of death, by cloſing their eyes againſt ſo bright a luſtre, and ſtopping their ears againſt the voice of the charmer? They are, indeed, in their own conceit, the only people, and wiſdom will die with them: ſo that to be ſure, they will ſcorn our pity. But who can forbear it? Is there a more melancholy thought than this, that the Son of God ſhould have done ſo much to introduce and eſtabliſh the goſpel, and his ſpirit ſo much to perpetuate and encreaſe its evidence; and that, after all, it ſhould be contemptuouſly deſpiſed, even by creatures who are periſhing without it? That the bleſſed Jeſus, inſtead of being received with open arms as the great deliverer, ſhould either be treated as an empty name; or if acknowledged to be a real perſon, ſhould then be repreſented as a viſionary enthuſiaſt, or a wicked impoſtor; for there is no other alternative; and this is not only, though I believe moſt frequently, by men of profligate and abandoned lives; but ſometimes by perſons of external morality and decency, of great humanity and ſweetneſs of temper (for ſuch I know are to be found among them) as well as men of wit and genius, of politeneſs and learning, of human prudence and experience in affairs. I may alſo add, that it is the cauſe of ſome who were the children of pious parents, who were trained up in the religious exerciſes, who once diſcovered ſerious impreſſions, and gave very encouraging hopes. Alas! whither are they fallen! How ſhall we ſhelter thoſe that were once our brethren, that are perhaps ſtill our friends, from the awful ſentence which the goſpel denounces againſt all that reject it, without any exception? As to the wretches that add inſult and deriſion to their infidelity, I tremble to think of that load of guilt which they are bringing upon themſelves; and how near their approach to the unpardonable ſin, if they have not already committed it. For the reſt, who behave in a more modeſt and ſober manner, it will, no doubt, be a very difficult taſk to convince them; and ſo much the rather, as ſome of them, by too eaſy a tranſition, have renounced many of the moſt important principles of natural religion; nay, I might add, even the whole of it, together with the Chriſtian revelation. But the influences of divine grace are almighty. Let us recommend them to it, and omit no other proper method, either of recovering ſuch as are already ſeduced,

duced, or at leaſt of ſecuring thoſe who are not yet infected; but may be, as moſt of the youth are, eſpecially in the moſt populous places, in imminent danger of the contagion. To this end let me add,

3. How reaſonable is it, that Chriſtians ſhould form a familiar acquaintance with the great evidences of our common faith?

It is what we ſo apparently owe to the honour of God, to the intereſt of Chriſt, to the peace of our own Souls, and the edification of others, that I hope I need not urge it at large, eſpecially conſidering what has been ſaid before. In conſequence of all, let it be your care to make evidences of Chriſtianity the ſubject of your ſerious reflection, and frequent converſe. Eſpecially ſtudy your Bibles, where ſuch marks of truth and divinity are to be found, that I believe few who have familiarly known them and have had a reliſh for them, were ever brought to make ſhipwreck of their faith as it is in Jeſus. Above all, let it be your care to act on the rules which are here laid down: and then ye will find your faith growing in a happy proportion, and experience the truth of our Saviour's declaration, that if any man will reſolutely and faithfully do his will, he ſhall know of the Chriſtian doctrine, whether it be of God. I verily believe, that it is the purity of its precepts which lies at the bottom of moſt men's oppoſition to it; or a natural pride of heart, which gives them an averſion to it; or a fond affection of ſeeming wiſer than others, in rejecting what moſt of their neighbours do, at leaſt profeſs to believe. When theſe unhappy prejudices and conceptions are, by divine grace, conquered and rooted out, the evidence of truth will daily appear with encreaſing luſtre: As the light of the ſun does to an eye recovering from a film with which it hath been overgrown; and which before had veiled it with midnight in the midſt of noon.

4. How ſolicitous ſhould we be to embrace and obey that goſpel, which comes attended with ſuch abundant evidences!

I may undoubtedly addreſs myſelf to moſt of my readers, and ſay, as Paul did to king Agrippa, *Believeſt thou the prophets? I know that thou believeſt:* yet let me intreat and charge you not to reſt here; but attentively to examine how far your hearts are affected, and your lives regulated by ſuch a belief. The Chriſtian revelation is a practical thing; and is heard, believed, and profeſſed in vain, if it be not obeyed.

In this goſpel *the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven againſt all the ungodlineſs of men:* but it is revealed with redoubled fury againſt that audacious ſinner, *who holds the truth in unrighteouſneſs.* In this goſpel the bleſſed Jeſus is exalted, both as a *Prince and Saviour*; and it is not with impunity, that the impenitent rebel can reject his yoke, and trample on his blood. What muſt they expect who have poured contempt on ſuch a Sovereign, and on ſuch a Redeemer?

Let it be earneſtly and frequently recollected, that this goſpel is the touchſtone by which you are one day to be tried; the balance in which an impartial judge will weigh you: and muſt, on the whole, prove your everlaſting triumph, or your everlaſting torment. The Almighty did not introduce it with ſuch ſolemn notice, ſuch high expectation, ſuch pompous miracles, ſuch awful ſanctions, that men might reject, or diſhonour it at pleaſure; but it will certainly be found, to the greateſt and meaneſt of thoſe that hear it, *a Saviour of life unto life, or a Saviour of death unto death.*

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Let it therefore be your immediate care to inquire, which of theſe it is likely to prove to your ſouls; remember it is ſo far from being a vain thing, that it is really your very life. If it have been hitherto deſpiſed, and that bleſſed Redeemer, in whom it ſo evidently centers, have been neglected, aſſure yourſelves, that all I have ſaid in confirmation of its truth, proves only, that the *hand-writing of God* is ſet to your condemnation. Allow yourſelves therefore not a moment's reſt, till you have with humble ſubmiſſion applied to his throne, while there is yet hope that it may be reverſed.

And for you who have hitherto believed and obeyed the goſpel, let it be your care to defend and adorn it; *be blameleſs and harmleſs, the children of God without rebuke, in the midſt of a crooked and perverſe generation, ſhining among them as lights in the world:* perhaps your example may not only ſerve to entertain their eyes, but *to guide their feet into the way of peace,* and engage them alſo to join with you in *glorifying your father which is in heaven:* above all, be careful to hold faſt the form of ſound words, and to adorn the Doctrine of God your Saviour in all things.

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